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## In Assyrian Tents







URIEL . . . SINGING THE HYMN TO GOD UPON "THE MOUNTAINS." (page 118)



# In Assyrian Tents

The Story of the Strange Adventures  
of Uriel

BY

LOUIS PENDLETON

AUTHOR OF "LOST PRINCE ALMON"



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# In Assyrian Tents

## CHAPTER I

### IN THE DOOMED CITY

THE HOUR was late and quiet reigned throughout Jerusalem. The wailing of women and the prayers and curses of men were heard no more. At last, in the oblivion of sleep, the city found rest from bodeful thoughts of the morrow.

But in one interior lights still burned and voices were heard. This house stood against the city wall, and from its flat roof that day those who still kept watch had looked down upon the messengers of Sennacherib,

and had heard the insolent words addressed to the people of Jerusalem and their king. The late watchers still grew hot with shame and rage as they remembered.

“Jerusalem’s blood be upon its own head,” was the burden of the message. “Hath King Hezekiah already forgotten how he was humbled in the dust before the great king of Assyria, that he should look for help to the broken staff of Egypt and cease to send tribute to Nineveh? Doth he remember no more the wasting of his land, the sacking of forty-six of his fenced towns, and the carrying away of two hundred thousand of his people into captivity? Behold, I come now to do all this and more, saith the great King Sennacherib. As my father did to Samaria, so will I do to



Judah, driving forth into captivity every inhabitant of the land.”

And when Eliakim, the minister of King Hezekiah, begged the messengers of Sennacherib to speak in the Assyrian language and not in the Hebrew, so that those on the walls might not understand, they contemptuously refused and cried out to the listening people:

“Let not your king deceive you nor your gods beguile you, for your doom is at hand if ye open not your gates and render not tribute to the last shekel. Both the people and the gods of Samaria were carried away captive, and so shall ye be also, and your king and your gods.”

Hearing this, the people answered not a word, but rent their clothes and looked to see fire descend from heaven

upon the blasphemers. Nor did Elia-kim answer, but, taking the writing addressed to King Hezekiah, he was lifted up again by the rope that had let him down among the Assyrians (for they were an army and the gates were shut). Then the messengers of Sennacherib called out to the people on the walls to make ready to die, and, with more taunts and threats, withdrew their forces to await the hour of battle.

So now there was much running to and fro, shouting, praying, weeping, and anxious consultation in Jerusalem. The soul of the king and the soul of the potter alike were troubled, and there was no man or woman who did not tremble at the thought of the morrow. But after darkness fell and the night grew old, anxious voices

were stilled and the lights went out—save in that house where the discussion of the universal peril had not ceased.

In a dimly-lighted chamber of this house, around a table whereon were bread and wine, three old men and a youth were seated. These were Joab, a kinsman of the High Priest; Shamah, a merchant; Amnon, their host; and Uriel, the latter's nephew.

They had told and retold the story of "the Assyrian wolves"; how in the fourth year of King Hezekiah they had descended upon Samaria, carrying away the ten tribes of Israel and scattering them broadcast in far countries; how, in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, under their new king, Sennacherib, they had invaded Judah also, besieging and sacking the

lesser cities, shutting Hezekiah up in Jerusalem “like a bird in a cage” (as Sennacherib wrote of it afterward), and carrying away thousands into captivity; how Hezekiah humbled himself and agreed to pay a tribute so heavy as to impoverish the country; and how, finally, under promise of aid from Sethos, king of Egypt, Hezekiah had dared to send no more tribute to Nineveh. So now, as the three graybeards in the house of Amnon agreed, the last state of the oppressed kingdom of Judah was to be worse than the first, “for the Assyrian wolves, countless in numbers, have again descended upon us, and will surely devour all that is left.”

“Hath the King no hope in Sethos, of Egypt?” asked Shamah.

“Alas,” groaned Amnon, “it is too late to send for succor, or join our men of war with those of Egypt, for already the hosts of Sennacherib are encamped between.”

“His only hope,” said Joab, “is in the God of Judah. I learn from the High Priest, my kinsman, that as soon as the letter of Sennacherib was brought to him, the King covered himself with sackcloth and went into the Temple, and wept and prayed before our God, beseeching that we may be delivered from the hands of the Assyrians.”

“And hath he received an answer?” asked Shamah, eagerly.

“Nay, not yet. He prepareth to send an embassy to Isaiah, but the prophet is now in the hills of the south, and the answer must be delayed.”

“ Alas that Isaiah should be absent from Jerusalem at such a time,” said Shamah.

“ He hath gone into retreat, as is his wont from time to time,” explained Joab. “ His house in Jerusalem is shut. It is a misfortune, indeed, that he should now be absent when most needed; for, unlike the cave-dwelling prophets of old, it is Isaiah’s habit to remain near the King, ever ready to give good counsel.”

“ We can but wait,” said Amnon, mournfully. “ For the strength of Judah, so glorious aforetime, is wasted and waned. We dare not face Sennacherib in the field.”

“ Where are the heroes of old?” groaned Shamah, lifting his hands in a gesture of despair. “ Where are



the mighty men of Israel? O for a David to go forth and slay this Assyrian Goliath!"

"*I will go forth to slay the Assyrian Goliath!*"

The eyes of all were turned upon the youth Uriel, as he suddenly rose to his feet and uttered this vow. His voice trembled, but his eye was steady, and there was about him an atmosphere of confidence and determination that amazed his companions. No hair grew on his face, he being scarcely more than seventeen years of age, but he was a man in stature, and his bared arms were proof of the possession of great strength. He looked a warrior, and yet the innocence of youth was in his eye, and his face was as comely as a girl's.

"Thou!" cried Amnon, his uncle.  
"Art thou mad?"

"Alas, thou art but a youth," said Joab, sadly, though he looked with great admiration at Uriel.

"They would slay thee ere thou couldst lay eyes on Sennacherib," said Shamah.

But Uriel, unmoved by these exclamations, asked eagerly of Joab: "Thinkest thou that if Sennacherib were slain the Assyrians would depart?"

"It may be, for men say he leads his people to war, not for territory or tribute, but for the love of fighting and conquering alone."

"Then," said Uriel, "I will go."

"Get thee to thy bed," cried Amnon, impatiently. "Is it not enough that Naphtali, thy father, is a captive among the Assyrians? Wilt thou rob thy mother of her son also and

bow her to the earth with sorrow when the news cometh that thy carcass is food for vultures? It were indeed virtuous to slay Sennacherib for thy country's sake, but thou wouldst slay thyself, not him. Go now to thy bed, that thou mayest rise at dawn, as is thy wont, and fetch water from the pool."

"Bear with me, my good uncle, and hear me speak."

"Get thee to thy bed!"

"Nay, let him first speak," said Joab.

"Let him speak," urged Shamah.

"A word is not a deed."

So Amnon sat down, shaking his head, and was silent.

"As thou sayest," began Uriel, "my father is a slave among the Assyrians, and it is for this in part that

I would go. Did I not long since swear to go in search of him when I became a man? It may be that even now he is performing vile service in the camp of Sennacherib—he that is of noble race!”

Uriel's lip trembled, and as he paused, breathing hard, Joab gently asked of him: “But how canst thou enter the Assyrian camp? They will know thee for a son of Judah by thy tongue.”

“I am acquainted with their language,” replied Uriel. “The Assyrian cripple whom the King decreed no man should harm, and to whom I have borne many gifts, he taught me to speak his tongue that I might one day seek my father. As for my mother,” the youth continued softly, “I leave her in good hands.”

“Nay, ’tis certain death,” cried Amnon, interrupting.

“Then death let it be,” said Uriel, with the manner of one inspired.

He looked from one to another, inquiring what was a life, a single life, if the sacrifice could purchase the safety of Jerusalem? What was one life when the welfare of a nation was at stake? If he turned back afraid from his errand, the city would be stormed and taken, thousands would be slain and other thousands would be led into captivity. How could he feel assured that they would not drag away his own dear mother even as they had carried away his father? What man or woman was safe? Might they not put rings in the lips of even the three graybeards who now halted and bade him not go forth? Only he

himself and the other young men who died fighting would be safe from shame. It would be death for him and captivity for his loved ones if his heart fainted and he turned back from his resolve. It could be no more than death for him if he went upon his errand, and it might be deliverance for his friends and his country.

“How can ye put forth a hand to stay me?” was his impassioned demand in conclusion. “Even my mother should rejoice to see me lying dead if I have first slain Sennacherib.”

Uriel spoke not with schooled eloquence, but with the truer eloquence of a heart deeply moved. His absorbing purpose, his high resolve and devotion, were heard in his voice and shone in his eye. It was a sight to see,



and one those who looked and listened would never forget. Thrilled to the soul, the three old men got upon their feet and came around the table to where Uriel stood, saluting him as one of great estate.

“A hero! Another hero is born in Israel,” they said wonderingly to one another. “God strengthen him and lead him to victory!”

Overcome, his fears forgotten, Amnon embraced and kissed his nephew, tears streaming down his face.

“Blessed be thou,” he said, “for thy heart is not set upon a young man’s vanities but upon great deeds. Go, then, Uriel, and save Jerusalem.”

In great excitement, but with settled determination, the three old men stood around the youth and discussed his mission, agreeing that he should

go forth without delay, but varying in their suggestions as to preparations.

“Alas, what of thy mother?” questioned Amnon. “Wilt thou not wake her and bid her farewell?”

“Nay, I would not call her up,” said Uriel. “She would plead with me and delay me till dawn. Yet I will bid her farewell.”

And while the old men busied themselves with provision for his journey, he stole into a dimly-lighted inner chamber of the house where a woman lay asleep, and he knelt in prayer beside the bed. Rising, he bent over and guardedly kissed his mother's face, halting for a moment and looking back as the woman stirred, turned unconsciously toward him, sighed, and smiled.

A few minutes later the breathless

old men and the devoted youth ascended the stair to the flat roof, which was on a level with and joined the top of the city wall. A cool current of air blew in their faces and bore to them the faint and far sound of crowing cocks. Behind them lay the city, a dusky vista of crowding buildings. Before them was the open country, dark, formless vacancy where lay the valleys, and irregular hazy outlines where the mountains rose against the horizon. The star-strewn sky-dome crowning all, in that moment of irrevocable decision, seemed to at least one of the four a bright promise of peace and protection.

Whatever the three old men may have felt as they strained at the rope that let him down to the base of the wall, Uriel knew no fear. And as he

loosed himself and softly called out a word of farewell, turning then to take his first step toward his great enterprise, he was uplifted with such courage and hope as he had never known.

## CHAPTER II

### DEATH ON THE HIGHWAY

IT WAS still dark, but Uriel moved forward with the rapid gait of one well acquainted with all his surroundings. He descended the steep slope, passed the King's Gardens and the Pool of Siloam, and crossed the brook flowing through the Valley of Hinnom. Climbing the opposite abrupt escarpment, he hurried along the highway through the hill country toward Bethlehem.

In the beauty and peace of that cloudless dawn there was no suggestion of the dread calamity overshadowing the land. The sun's red rays flashed across the blue hills, and the birds as always piped a cheerful

welcome to the new day. While wreathing mists swam upward between the green walls of long, deep glens, the morning breeze caressed the olives and stirred with a playful touch the feathery crests of tall, graceful palms. There was, indeed, an atmosphere of solemnity, but also of peace, about the darker cedars and cypresses crowding the loftier slopes beneath the bold bare rocks of the mountain heights.

As he hurried onward in the full light of morning, Uriel observed that ordinary sounds were hushed and that the countryside was to all appearances deserted. No moving figures attracted his eye save those of three lepers coming forth from their caves to stand within hail of the highway, as was their wont, trusting that

their hoarse cries and the spectacle of their terrible affliction would soften the hearts of travellers and induce them to deposit gifts of silver, or of food, or clothing by the roadside.

But now there appeared to be no travellers, and it was plain that the shepherds and vinegrowers had fled to the hills, carrying with them their beasts and all their other most precious possessions. The fear of the Assyrian wolves was upon the land. Stopping at the vineyard of a kinsman, where he had hoped to secure a horse, Uriel found all doors locked and barred, saw no sign of man or beast, and received no answer to his repeated calls.

It was clear that he must abandon his mission or walk. He accepted the latter necessity with an undaunted

heart, though impatient and restless at the thought of the delay involved. As he journeyed southward with all possible speed, he wondered if the great highway between Jerusalem and Hebron had ever before been so deserted. From dawn till mid-afternoon he encountered scarcely a dozen of his countrymen, and these stole along the highway with a furtive and watchful air, ready at the first alarm to dart into the cover of bordering rocks or forest. Uriel did likewise, for several times large companies of Assyrians passed by, some going northward, some southward. They were fully armed, were fierce and cruel of aspect, and the uproar of their horses and chariots, as it broke upon the unnatural stillness, carried fear to the soul of every watchful traveller.



The warning of the presence of the Assyrians had been borne as if by magic to the remotest settlements, and yet, strange as it seemed, the tidings had not reached all. For late in the afternoon Uriel was witness of an encounter between the caravan of a merchant and a considerable force of the invaders.

He had marked the approach of the latter and stepped aside, ascending the rocky hillside that he might look down and watch them as they passed. As the Assyrians came thundering southward on the highway they were the only repelling object in a peaceful and almost enchanting scene. The hills rose steeply from the winding road, with cypress-bordered bits of greensward here and there, and a few graceful palm trees

in the view rising upward slenderly and spreading their feathery crests, here against the purple sky and there outlined upon the background of distant and darker blue mountain walls.

At a point below Uriel's place of observation the highway curved, turning almost at right angles. Thus travellers coming southward were screened by the intervening rocks from those moving northward. Absorbed in watching the Assyrians who drew near from the right, Uriel did not for some time look toward his left, and was not aware that a merchant's caravan was approaching from the south and would soon pass round the bend to encounter the invaders. When he finally observed his imperilled countrymen there was as yet a considerable space to be covered be-

fore they exposed themselves to the view of the advancing Assyrians.

Obeying his first impulse, he dashed downward over the rocks and through the thickets, hoping to warn them in time. But the distance and the difficulties were greater than he supposed, and when, bruised and panting, he reached the border of the highway below the bend, the foremost riders of the caravan had already turned the angle and exposed themselves to view. For he now heard a great shout from the Assyrians and knew that they were charging down upon their helpless prey. From his position on the hillside he had noted that the caravan was preceded by five or six armed men on horses, and consisted of three camels and six pack-asses, each bound to the other by a

long connecting rope. All the beasts of burden appeared to be heavily laden with merchandise, except the last camel in the line, on which two women were riding. This animal and the one just in advance were all that could now be seen, the third camel and the pack-asses having passed round the bend after the merchant and his mounted guards.

Uriel hesitated, doubtful what to do. Then he ran forward, drawing a knife from his girdle, cut the rope that bound the last camel to the line, and led the beast aside.

“What wouldst thou do?” a woman’s voice demanded sharply. “Who art thou?”

“Seest thou not that I would save thee from the Assyrians?” he cried, breathless, looking up and observing



"SEEST THOU NOT THAT I WOULD SAVE THEE FROM THE ASSYRIANS?"



for the first time that the camel bore not two women, but one woman and a little girl scarcely more than ten years old.

“The Assyrians!” gasped the woman in terror. She had heard the startled cries of the mounted guards, but supposed it was only an ordinary attack of robbers that might be repelled.

“Be quick!” said Uriel, when he had caused the camel to kneel. “We have little time.”

At this moment shouts, clashing swords, and a shrill shriek of terror were heard, and, turning, Uriel saw that another woman sat upon the second camel. He saw also that arrows were flying over her head, and that the pack-asses and the third camel had shrunk back from the shock of battle

and were now in full view, huddling together and trembling.

Uriel threw his left arm around the little girl, lifting her bodily, and with his right hand literally dragged the woman from her seat. Carrying the one and forcibly leading the other, he rushed up the rocky slope and into the cover of the shrubs and trees, halting only when well assured that they were entirely screened from view.

“If thou wouldst escape Assyrian captivity, keep the child quiet and stir not a foot,” he commanded.

“O Gamaliel—they will slay him!” groaned the woman, clasping the little girl to her breast.

“Stay here, and I will return to aid him if I can—and the other woman.”



Uriel hurried back to the point whence he could overlook the highway. There he saw at once that he had done all he could do for the members of the ill-fated caravan. The fighting was over and he doubted not that the merchant and his guards were slain. Far down the road their riderless horses plunged madly, followed by several pack-asses and the three camels, on one of which the unfortunate woman could still be seen. The highway was filled with Assyrian pursuers on horses and in chariots, shouting and laughing as though engaged in sport. Opposite Uriel lay two pack-asses that had been killed by chance arrows and around them dismounted Assyrians swarmed like vultures, tearing open the bales of merchandise and scattering the con-

tents for yards around. Apparently they sought gold and jewels only, rejecting bulkier though precious goods. But might they not desire fair captives that could be sold into slavery, and would not the vacant seat on the last camel of the line attract their notice and cause them to search for the wife and child of the merchant?

Disturbed by this thought, Uriel drew back guardedly from his point of observation, and returned in haste to the woman and child.

“Come,” he said, “we must go farther away or ye may be taken.”

“But Gamaliel—?”

“As yet I cannot say. The highway is thronged with Assyrians. When I have placed thee where they cannot find thee, I will return to look for him.”

“Nay, I will not go! It shall not be said that Elisabeth of Hebron deserted her lord in his hour of need.”

“Think of the child.”

“I am athirst,” said the little girl, insistently, as if in repetition of a previous demand.

“Hush thee, Josepha!”

But Uriel caught little Josepha in his arms, and the frantic woman submitted, following as he led the way upward and then down into a deep glen overshadowed by a dense growth of cypresses. In the hollow they found a clear spring, green-bordered with mosses and papyrus. Bidding them sit where myrtles and flowering oleanders would screen them, Uriel brought water for the child.

When he returned to the highway the Assyrians were gone, all sounds

had ceased, and he ventured forth without apprehension. No living thing was left on the scene. The hapless merchant and his armed guards lay where they fell fighting. Near them were three dead horses, farther away two dead pack-asses, and scattered between, the rejected merchandise. Uriel selected a cloak, a woollen cloth, a leathern water-skin, a vessel containing wine, and some food, carrying all to a sheltered spot in the cover of the rocks and trees. Then he lifted and struggled with the body of Gamaliel, the merchant, to another sheltered spot not far away, but screened from the view of the first by a thick growth of shrubs. Covering the dead with the cloth, he returned to the glen.

As he drew near the spot where

they awaited him, Uriel noted that the clothing worn by the mother and child was costly, and everything about them indicated that they were not people of the common sort. The hapless woman was still young, and her unusual beauty forced itself upon the youth's attention in spite of the horror and dread overshadowing her face. To the eye of Uriel little Josepha was fairer still, and there was about her the suggestion of something rare and fine. Unconscious of calamity, she smiled at Uriel as he approached. He smiled in turn, thinking that no queen's crown was as becoming as her clustering black curls and likening her lips to pomegranate blooms.

“Gamaliel!—what of him?” cried the mother, starting up.

“Come and thou shalt see him,” said Uriel, so gravely that the woman caught her breath and suppressed a cry.

He hastened to report that the Assyrians were departed, and that they might now return to their former place, there to eat and rest. Having led them thither, spread the cloak on the ground, invited the little girl to sit, and given her food, he drew the mother aside.

“There—behind that rock,” he said, pointing, and gently added: “Be brave, as thine own Gamaliel was brave, for the sake of this dear child. Thy lot is but the lot of thousands whose husbands and sons must die fighting the wolves of Assyria.”

The poor woman ran from him in the middle of his speech, and he heard

her low cry as she sank down by the body of Gamaliel. Turning quickly to the little girl, he spoke cheerfully, breaking open a pomegranate, and calling her attention to the beauty of the opal-like grains within, some of them almost as varied in coloring as foam bubbles trembling in the wind. Josepha remained interested and contented to stay with her new-found friend for a little while only. Suddenly she started up, calling anxiously, and ran away on the track of her mother.

Following close at her heels, Uriel saw that the wife of Gamaliel had uncovered the face of her dead and was crouching over it in deep, silent grief. She hastily covered the still face as she marked the approach of the child, and turning, said:

“Go back. Thy father is asleep, and will sleep long.”

“My father is asleep,” said Josepha, warningly, to Uriel, and readily returned with him.

He did not seek to entertain her longer, but proposed that they also sleep, stretching himself out and closing his eyes. The tired child was more disposed to do likewise than he had hoped and soon lay quiet in sound sleep. Covering her with care, he hurried to the mother’s side.

“Josepha is asleep,” he said, as the widow looked up at him vacantly, “and we can talk of what is to be done. It grows late and ye cannot stay here. We must take the road and find lodging for the night.”

“And leave him thus !” cried the widow, putting her hand forth upon



the shrouded dead. "Nay, do not ask me—not even for the child."

Uriel then gently assured her that he could hope to procure no beast whereon she might carry her dead, for there were only those of the plundered caravan, and they had all been driven far away by the Assyrians, including the camel ridden by the unfortunate woman.

"She was my maidservant—poor Zillah!" said the widow of Gamaliel, diverted for the moment from her own grief.

For the present the body must be left behind, but not unprotected. Near at hand there was a niche in a rocky slope which could receive the dead and be readily walled up with stones, being thus made secure from the attack of wild beasts. To this plan the widow reluctantly consented.

“ So let it be,” she said, “ and some day I will come and take away his bones.”

Therefore, having broken boughs of cedar and cypress, Uriel placed the shrouded body upon them and covered it with them in the rough tomb, toiling patiently then until the opening had been securely closed with heavy stones.

“ Now let us go,” he said.

“ Farewell, my Gamaliel,” said the widow brokenly, but with dry eyes. “ May our just God deal well with thee and bring confusion upon thy murderers. May He smite them with a heavy hand and drive them forth in terror from the land now cruelly trodden beneath their feet ! ”

Uriel sighed as he heard these words. The strength of Judah was

broken, and where was the mighty host that could pluck victory from the all-conquering Assyrians, whose name alone caused men to tremble? Turning away sadly, he lifted the sleeping child in his arms and bade the mother follow him.

## CHAPTER III

### WHAT BEFELL AT THE INN

THE SUN had set and the deepening twilight warned Uriel to make haste. He led the way to the highway at a point some distance from the scene of the afternoon's tragedy. "Would I could bury the poor guards also," was his thought, "but now it is night, and my duty to the living drives me hence." They had not gone far on their road when the child awoke, and the mother insisted that she be put down and allowed to walk. Clinging to Uriel's hand, Josepha asked why her father was not with them.

"He still sleeps," explained her mother after a moment of troubled silence.

“ Will he come after us? ” asked the wondering child. “ Will we go to him? ”

“ Yes, we are to go to him—but not now. ”

Two hours later Uriel left the mother and child in a sheltered spot near the highway on the outskirts of a village and went forward to find a lodging for the night. He soon returned with the report that a body of Assyrians had encamped on the farther side of the settlement, but that the streets were quiet, and it seemed reasonably safe to lodge at an inn not far away.

The door of the inn stood open, and from it issued the agreeable odor of cooking meat. Only the innkeeper and his wife were visible, and Uriel entered boldly, carrying Josepha, who

had again fallen asleep. The wife of Gamaliel followed watchfully, noting that the room was large and bare of adornment, containing little more than several tables, whereon were wine cups and vessels of the common sort.

“We wish lodging for the night and food,” said Uriel.

“Give me the child,” said the innkeeper’s wife. With a pleased, motherly smile she took the little girl and bore her, panting beneath the weight, through the door of an inner room. The widow of Gamaliel was about to follow when an announcement of the innkeeper arrested her step.

“I see that ye are good folk,” he said, “but nevertheless ye must pay before ye eat and sleep. These are bad times. How do I know that the

Assyrians will not come and rob you ere I have my dues? ”

He mentioned a reasonable sum, and Uriel drew forth his purse.

“Nay, nay, good youth,” said the widow of Gamaliel, forcing her own purse upon Uriel, “not one-half a shekel shalt thou lose. Gold cannot repay what I owe thee, yet I shall now pay not alone for me and mine this night, but for thee also.”

At this moment the eyes of all were turned toward the door, through which an Assyrian soldier burst noisily.

“*Yayin, yayin!*” he cried in the Hebrew.

His swimming eyes and unsteady movements indicated that he had taken more wine already than was good for him. He seemed to forget

his thirst as his gaze became fixed on the widow of Gamaliel. "A pretty captive," he muttered in the Assyrian, which Uriel alone of those present understood. Suddenly he turned toward the door and called as if to friends without: "A pretty captive! A pretty captive! Come and let us take her away!"

There was no response, his comrades apparently having passed on. Unmindful or unconscious of this, he turned and seized the shrinking woman, disregarding Uriel's loud and commanding "Hold!" He was dragging her toward the door, and she was crying out and struggling, when Uriel caught up a club standing against the wall and struck him a crushing blow. He dropped to the floor like a log, the woman breaking from his clutch and standing back.



“Go within,” urged Uriel, and the widow of Gamaliel ran panting into the adjoining room, closing the door behind her.

Meanwhile the innkeeper hastily shut the outer door. He now spoke accusingly to Uriel as they looked at each other across the body of the prostrate Assyrian.

“I am a man of peace,” he grumbled. “I harm no man, yet the Assyrians will come and take vengeance upon me for this thy deed.”

“Wouldst thou have had me stay my hand?” cried Uriel, full of wrath.

The innkeeper shook his head dolefully without reply, then called loudly, “Caleb! Caleb!” A young man entered promptly from a door at the lower end of the eating-room. Without explanation the innkeeper

bade the newcomer assist him to lift and carry the Assyrian. Uriel followed as far as the court in the rear, whence he saw them open a gate in a wall and carry their burden without. In the dim light they could then be seen swinging the body back and forth until they let go their hold and it dropped suddenly out of sight as if over a precipice. Uriel turned abruptly and found his way back to the front room, where the innkeeper's wife was now on her knees wiping up the bloodstains from the floor.

“The drop is deep and the wood at the bottom is dense,” the innkeeper was saying with a grim smile as he and his son returned. “If the Assyrians find him they will not know who slew him.”

While the widow of Gamaliel was

served at her request in the inner room, food and wine were brought also to Uriel in the outer apartment, and as he ate the innkeeper sat near and talked with him.

“This woman is of high station,” said the landlord, inclining his head toward the door which screened the wife of Gamaliel from view. “Art thou her kinsman?”

“Nay, I know her not. I go upon a mission southward, and she would return to Jerusalem.” Uriel then briefly told the story of the plundered caravan.

“Why doth not the King pay the tribute?” exclaimed the innkeeper, impatiently, when he had heard all. “’Tis he who hath brought such affliction upon the land.”

“Surely thou knowest that he

trusted in the promise from Egypt," said Uriel, loyally. "He hath been taken unawares."

"Let him humble himself before the Assyrians. There is naught else to do. He doth wrong to delay."

"He doth right," declared Uriel. "Not till every hope is dead would I see him bend Judah's back once more to the burden of tribute. O that we were strong enough to match Sennacherib in the field!"

"The burden of war is greater than the burden of tribute. Each eats up the substance of the land, but war also slays the flower of our young men. As for me, I am well assured that it is better to be taxed for the king of Assyria than to be taxed to pay for war and lose my sons also."

"It is because of such as thou that

we are fallen so low," cried Uriel, ceasing to eat in his excitement. "I am ready to give my life, and were I old and had ten sons, I should gladly give them all for Judah's freedom!"

"The Assyrians will leave us free if we pay the tribute," said the innkeeper, quietly, though his eye kindled as he watched and listened to his young guest.

"Ay," said Uriel, "they will leave us free to slave for them and send all our earnings to Nineveh!"

At this moment the outer door was flung open and seven Assyrian soldiers entered noisily. Repeatedly shouting, "*Yayin! Lehem!*" (wine—bread),—thus exhausting their vocabulary of Hebrew words,—they seated themselves at the tables with an air of proprietorship. The innkeeper

leaped to his feet, and, bowing and smiling, hastened to supply them with food and drink. He knew that he would receive nothing in payment, but hoped that his house might not be pillaged and that his family might escape harm.

Uriel remained quiet and unnoticed in his corner, where he covertly watched the Assyrians and eagerly listened to their speech. Whether he should obtain useful information or not, he was glad of the opportunity to hear their language spoken. At first he lost much of what they said, but gradually followed them more readily, perceiving that they spoke only of the day's experience and of the acts of violence which they had committed. They laughed as they recounted the latter and seemed to exult

in the distress of the Hebrew country-folk whom they had robbed or otherwise ill-treated, but their faces were not all as fierce or vicious as Uriel had expected. Some of them were quite young, but three wore beards half a foot in length, in each case carefully curled in the Assyrian fashion.

The food and drink were evidently productive of good humor among them, and the innkeeper hoped that they would leave his house in peace. But when they rose from the tables they began to look about them covetously, and one of them suddenly threw open the door of the inner room, revealing the widow of Gamaliel where she sat by a couch on which lay her sleeping child.

“A slave!” cried the Assyrians.  
“A beautiful slave!”

Before any one could interfere, the poor woman was drawn into the eating-room, and she stood struggling in the grasp of two of the fiercest of the invaders. That they were all determined to carry her away captive was plain, and the innkeeper and his son looked at each other in helpless sorrow, standing still in their places. Uriel did not thus submit. Forgetting his great mission, and unmindful that he could only sacrifice his life in vain, he leaped forward, full of wrath, to his countrywoman's defense. But the innkeeper seized him as he was about to pass rushing to his death, and, with help from the young man Caleb, bore him down and held him fast, although he struggled furiously.

“Uriel,” called out the wife of



Gamaliel, who had observed all this and had now ceased to struggle with her captors—"Uriel, listen to my last word. I cannot live as a slave among wild beasts, and ere the night is old I shall find the only means of escape from them."

"Oh, not so—say not so!" groaned Uriel, his eyes so blinded with a rush of tears that he could scarcely see the woman's pale face.

"I go to Gamaliel," he heard her unsteady voice continue, "and I leave my child with thee. Keep her in safety until the invaders are gone, then take her to Jerusalem, and claim for her the inheritance of Gamaliel. Thou hast my purse and in it thou wilt find that which will prove her name and rights. And, Uriel, thou noble youth, if it pleaseth thee to wed her

when she is of the proper age and thou, too, art older, know that it is my desire, for there is none more worthy than thou. Farewell!”

Respecting the desperate woman's desire to say these parting words, the Assyrians halted for a moment and suffered her to speak. But now they hurriedly bore her away, while Uriel lay struggling fiercely on the floor.

“Let me go! Let me go and save her!”

But cords having been brought by the innkeeper's wife, the three succeeded in binding him hand and foot, after which he was lifted bodily and placed on the floor in an obscure corner.

“Why shouldst thou go to thy death in vain?” argued the innkeeper. “If we are to have war, thy country hath

need of thy stout heart and strong arm. I grieve for the poor woman even as thou, but only a host could take her from the Assyrians.”

“Only cowards would let her go without the lifting of a hand,” cried Uriel, shaken with sobs.

The innkeeper’s wife began to weep aloud, her heart torn with grief for the poor captive and moved to sympathy and love for Uriel. “O day of evil!” she mourned. “That I should live to see these things beneath this roof!”

“Go to the child,” bade her husband, and she gladly withdrew.

The sorrows of that night were not ended. Within an hour another and larger party of Assyrians invaded the house, searching it throughout for hidden treasure. And when they de-

parted they carried away little Josephapha before the eyes of Uriel, who lay writhing and frantic in the corner. He heard them as they discussed the beauty of the sleeping child and the possible amount of silver that one of the great lords in the camp of Sennacherib would pay for so desirable a slave. They answered the cries and entreaties of the innkeeper's wife with harsh words, and bore the child away, together with a part of the innkeeper's hidden gold, which they forced him to surrender and which he swore was all.

When the house was quiet once more the innkeeper and his son came to Uriel, and, lifting him, carried him to an upper room. Placing him on a bed, they spread light covering over him, but did not loose his bonds.

“He will not rest easy thus,” the innkeeper said to his son, “but if we loose him he will rush forth to his death even now.”

“Ye have saved my life and made me forever ashamed,” said Uriel, accusingly, as they prepared to leave him.

“Remember thy mission to the south,” said the innkeeper, soothingly. “If it be of great importance thou wilt one day thank me. And if the hosts of Judah be called out to face the Assyrians, thou wilt again thank me. For in saving thee for thy country from useless death, I have also saved thine honor. The honor so dear to a young man hath in thy case received no hurt. Thou didst all thou couldst, and being bound hand and foot, thou couldst do no more. Therefore, be comforted.”

In the apathy that succeeded his fierce struggles and keen grief, Uriel listened without further exclamation, and he was for a moment diverted from the fate of his friends when the innkeeper turned at the door to add:

“This will be a night of grief for me and mine as well as for thee. Thou hast been robbed of the friends of an hour, but I have been robbed of the savings of ten years—of the half of that which was to keep hunger from my door in helpless old age.”

The sun had risen high when the innkeeper returned to the room and roused Uriel from the troubled sleep into which he had finally drifted at dawn. He was told that the Assyrians had long since broken camp and departed with their captives and their booty, that he could not hope to

overtake them even with the fleetest horses, and that, therefore, he was now free to go his way.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PROPHET'S WORD

AS URIEL went on his journey he experienced the most bitter sorrow he had ever known, save on the day his mother fell to the floor at the news that his father was among those taken alive and carried away captive by Sennacherib. Even then it was more the sight of his mother's grief than the thought of his own loss that moved him, for he was still young. Now he was shaken with a young man's rage as well as a boy's sorrow as he reflected upon the fate of the fair woman and the fairer girl whom he had learned to love.

He had shed tears while bound and helpless in the night, but now he grew



hot, and his eyes glowed, as youthful hope and high resolve were re-awakened. One thing comforted him. The Assyrians had gone southward with their captives. Therefore he could follow on their track without departing from the course that led to the camp of Sennacherib. Might he not save them while on the road—rescue them by night, perhaps, and place them in some haven of safety? O that he might fall upon their captors and upon all the invaders with a great army! O that he might do such deeds as were done by the great captains of his race! Joshua and Jephtha and Gideon and Saul and David—why might he not become a warrior such as these?

He thought that if there were even ten thousand true men who feared not

death and longed for victory, as did he, the invaders might be driven, humbled and broken, from the country. But there were not ten thousand. There were not ten hundred. Bent to the yoke were the necks of his people and the warlike spirit had gone from them. His once mighty nation had too long decayed in the indolence of an inglorious peace. So reflected Uriel, chafing against the bonds of circumstance as does a young lion against prison bars.

It was long past noon and the sun declined when hunger drove him inland from the deserted highway. Ascending among the foothills of a range of mountains, he found a path which led ere long to the house of a shepherd. Apparently the master had either fled or was watching his

sheep on a distant pasture ground, for Uriel saw no sign of life. The tree tops and vines showing above the garden wall tempted him with thoughts of grapes and figs. Even though the shepherd's family were not there to welcome him, he could satisfy his hunger and pass on without robbery, provided he carried nothing away, for he recalled the Mosaic law which read: "When thou comest into thy neighbor's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel."

Uriel approached without fear, therefore, expecting to scale the wall if need be, and found to his surprise that the gate was not locked. As he pushed it open and entered, he heard the stroke of a staff on some soft sub-

stance, and promptly discovered a woman under a fig tree at the farther side of the garden, within a few feet of the shepherd's modest stone dwelling. A skin churn filled with milk was suspended from a bough, and the woman was engaged in beating it with her staff, causing it to swing to and fro. She started apprehensively on seeing Uriel, but his face, dress, and manner disarmed suspicion. She watched his approach in silent admiration, and greeted him without fear, won in an instant by his beauty, the innocence of his eye, and his manly bearing.

“I am athirst and hungry,” he said. “I pray thee for food and drink.”

“My man is in the far pasture with the sheep,” she told him, “but thou art welcome.”

She gave him a seat by a small table beneath a balcony upborne on palm trunks, and brought him bread, wine, and fruit from within the house. As he ate hastily and in silence, she struck a few more blows on the suspended skin churn, then feeling it and apparently satisfied that the butter was made, took it down and carried it within.

“Why is it,” asked Uriel, when she returned, bringing him milk, “that ye also have not fled in fear of the Assyrians?”

“We are not without fear, yet we trust to the word of the prophet that we shall be left in peace.”

“Speakest thou of Isaiah?”

“Of him. He is there,”—the woman pointed toward the blue mountain tops,—“and his presence is our protection.”

“Why,” asked Uriel, “should he protect thee and thine, and not all the people of this region?”

“I know not, unless it be that we became his servants of our own free will. Since the day we knew he had chosen this mountain for communion with God we have sent him offerings of food and wine at morning and at evening. When tidings of the Assyrians reached us, Jared, my man, went and bowed before him in fear and trembling, but the prophet bade him be comforted and promised that the Assyrians should not set foot on our land.”

“Doth he speak freely with thy man?”

“Nay, he hath spoken twice only. We dare not obtrude upon him, but place our offerings upon a rock, call

out to him from afar, and come away, for it is holy ground."

"Thinkest thou," asked Uriel, eagerly, "that he would deign to speak to me?"

"How can I say, not knowing thy business? If thou goest merely to look upon him, thou wilt be made to repent, but if thy message requireth an answer from the man of God, have no fear. The messengers of King Hezekiah will assuredly be answered and come away satisfied."

"Hast thou seen the King's messengers to Isaiah?"

"Ay; they broke bread with us and passed on within the hour."

Uriel rose hurriedly.

"I would follow them and ask a question of my lord the prophet ere I go forward on my mission. Wilt thou show me the path?"

“That will I,” replied the shepherdess, convinced of his earnestness and good purpose.

“And wilt thou let me be the bearer of thy evening offering, that I may have excuses should my heart fail me so that I speak not of my mission?”

“That will I also,” answered the woman, gently. “I perceive thou art sore troubled in mind, good youth, and I will do all I may to aid thee.”

She bade him wait a little and hurried into the house, soon returning with a skin of wine and a basket of breads and fruit.

“Take this, our evening offering,” she said, “and if need be say thou art the friend of the shepherd Jared and his wife Adah.”

“I am Uriel, of Jerusalem,” res-



ponded the youth, hurriedly. "My father hath long been a captive among the Assyrians, and I go upon a mission to the camp of Sennacherib."

"Alas, I fear for thee—thou art so young," said the woman, her voice gentle and her eye tender and pitying. "Thou dost well to hear first the word of the prophet."

"I have no fear," declared Uriel, with a strong young man's confidence.

"Follow this path," directed the shepherdess, when they had passed out into the forest, "and within the hour thou wilt arrive. God be with thee on thy way."

"And God bless thee for thy goodness to a stranger. Farewell!"

The path was well marked, having often been trodden by the sheep fol-

lowing Jared to distant mountain pastures. It was not possible to go astray, but as he went forward Uriel became more and more uneasy. What troubled him was the thought of meeting the prophet. Could he confess the nature of his mission, and might not Isaiah know all before a word was spoken? What if he should forbid the enterprise and enjoin a presumptuous youth to return to his home, there to await such series of events as might be ordained by Providence? And if so, how could he, Uriel, support his disappointment? For he would not dare disobey. Would it not be wiser, therefore, to follow his own promptings and forbear to seek communion with the man of God?

Thus troubled and thus hesitating,

Uriel looked neither to right nor left as he climbed upward, and saw nothing of the beauty of near or distant views bathed in the rich glows of departing day. The palms and cypresses, the bold bare rocks, the deep glens wherein clear streams broke white and noisily over obstructing stones, the purple mountain tops afar—these brought no pleasure to his heedless eye. He saw only the upward winding path, and heard only the questions which were asked and were not answered in his own agitated mind.

The shades of evening were gathering when he drew near the dreaded spot. He knew his journey was at an end when he saw the guide sent by the shepherd Jared seated idly on the border of the path, awaiting the return of the King's messengers. Pass-

ing on in silence for some short distance, Uriel halted suddenly at the sound of voices and screened himself behind a rock.

A few feet forward he saw two men clothed in sackcloth and bowed to the earth as if before a king, but the object of their adoration was hidden by intervening obstructions. Uriel moved to shift his position that he might see more, but a twig snapped harshly beneath his tread, and one of the kneeling men turned his head, startled, in the direction of the sound. So the youth remained in his place, fearing detection and breathing hard. Much as he wished to gain a point whence the form of the prophet might be seen, he dared not take the risk at once, and, moreover, he wished to hear the words that might be spoken.

The two kneeling messengers kept their eyes mostly upon the ground, as if in awe, but now and then they looked up doubtfully, and their glances seemed to rest upon objects some distance from them. At last they spoke, and loudly enough for Uriel to hear.

“It is ended,” said one.

“The prophet hath dismissed him,” said the other.

“The prophet retireth again within the cave,” said the first speaker.

“And now Elihu returneth to us.”

The two men rose and stood waiting. The sound of footsteps was heard, and then they were joined by a third old man clothed also in sack-cloth. It was at once plain to Uriel that Elihu, the leader, had gone forward at the prophet's bidding, while

the other messengers remained afar and waited. Standing in his place, the youth now heard all that passed between them.

“What said he, Elihu?”

“He bids the King be of good cheer.”

“What saidst thou to him?”

“I said: ‘Hear, my lord, for, lo, King Hezekiah hath rent his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and doth weep, and hath bidden thy servants seek thee and learn the will of Judah’s God. For the Assyrians have descended upon us, and Sennacherib doth threaten Jerusalem, raising his despoiling hand even against the Temple of our God.’”

“And what said he in answer?”

“He bade me say to our master, the King: ‘Thus saith the Lord, Be not

afraid of the words which thou hast heard. That which thou hast prayed to Me against Sennacherib, king of Assyria, I have heard. Behold, I will send a blast upon him.' ”

“ Aha, a ‘blast upon him’ ! ”

“ Said he no more ? ”

“ Much more. He bade me say that thus the Lord hath said of Sennacherib: ‘ I know thy abode, and thy going out and thy coming in, and thy rage against Me. Because thy rage against Me and thy tumult are come up into Mine ears, therefore I will put My hook in thy nose, and My bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way which thou camest.’ ”

“ A bridle in his lips and a hook in his nose ! ” cried one of the listening messengers. “ Judah is saved ! ”

“ The prophet also promised to re-

turn to Jerusalem with all speed and himself take counsel with King Hezekiah, as is his custom," said Elihu. "Let us hasten to the King with the good news," he added urgently.

Thereupon the three moved away along the beaten path, passing near the crouching figure of Uriel, but not observing him.

Uriel's first impulse was to follow and question them, for he longed to know what might be Elihu's interpretation of the prophet's mysterious words. In what way was a "blast" to be sent upon the Assyrians, and how was a "hook" to be put into Sennacherib's nose, or his lips to be bridled?

But the youth halted ere he had taken three steps. He knew that the King's messengers would resent his



questions and that they could not be expected to publish the great news before they had returned and reported to the King. So he stood still reflecting, and anon remembered that he bore the evening offering of the shepherd family, and that he, too, wished to seek an answer from the prophet.

The recollection brought fresh perplexities. If the discomfiture of the Assyrians was ordained, if they were to be driven forth by an unforeseen and mysterious "blast," why need he sacrifice his life in order to raise his own puny hand against the life of Sennacherib? If he persisted, would he not be convicted of both a presumptuous ambition and of light regard for those who loved him and would mourn his loss? In great an-

guish of mind the youth stood undecided some moments longer, then resolved to confess all to the prophet and abide by his counsel.

Taking up the wine-skin and the basket, he approached the cavern's mouth, the dark irregular outlines of which he now plainly perceived in a precipitous wall of rock some short distance up the slope. But terror of what he proposed to do grew upon him as he drew near, and he knew that it was easier to face a roaring lion than stand before that dark cavern and call aloud the name of the man whose ears were open to the voice of the Lord God.

It was not the thought of bodily harm but the dread of offending by his presumption that made him quake, and brought out the cold sweat

on his brow. This was holy ground and he was unholy. He thought of the man who touched the ark of the Lord and fell dead ere he could withdraw his hand from that rash sacrilege.

As he placed the shepherd's evening offering on a flat stone at the cavern's entrance and opened his mouth to call, Uriel knew that he could not face the man of God. It was impossible. His mouth ran dry and his tongue refused him utterance. Fear of the unseen, the unknown, held him as in the grasp of a benumbing, giant hand.

He had no sooner dropped his burden than he turned giddily and hastened down the mountain, looking backward, startled, at the sound of every shaking leaf, and hurrying the

more as the deepening darkness warned him that he might go utterly astray and wander back unaware to that dread spot before the prophet's cave.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CAPTIVE'S SONG

URIEL DID not stop at the shepherd's home on his way down the mountain. Seeing lights, he thought regretfully of the gentle Adah and of the comforts that might be his, but he knew that the King's messengers would rest there, and he feared to present himself before them. He was unwilling either to reveal to them the nature of his mission southward or confess that his heart had failed him when he stood before the prophet's cave.

After a last backward glance and a sigh, he resolutely followed the downward path, halting only when he reached an abandoned sheepfold near the highway, where he passed the

night on a pile of cut grass. He rose at dawn and continued his southward journey, confident and despondent by turns.

At times he allowed himself to believe that his mission still claimed him in spite of the prophet's words. Might not he, even he, be the chosen instrument of the humiliation of the Assyrians? Might not the death of their king at his hand send them forth grief-stricken and afraid, and thus the prayer of King Hezekiah be answered? In calmer moments he rebuked himself for this proud thought, but it returned again to tempt him. Even while doubtful and despondent he kept on his way, spurred by the love of action and adventure. He told himself that he was at least free to continue his journey until he could

look down upon the great Assyrian encampment from some neighboring hill, and that till then the final decision might be delayed.

One thing that had troubled him from the outset now troubled him yet more. A few words uttered by the three old men ere they sent him forth showed that they expected him to slay Sennacherib by stealth and not in open, honorable combat. They knew better than he that the former was the only possible method, and had the case been argued, they would have justified that method on the ground that Sennacherib was a public, not a private, enemy, and that his death would mean freedom for their oppressed country. A tyrant could not be challenged to open combat, and if the blow were struck at all, it must be

in secret. But Uriel shrank with horror from the thought of stabbing even his country's arch-enemy in the back or while asleep. From the outset he cherished the hope that he might kill Sennacherib in a fair encounter, forgetting that nothing short of a miracle of chance could bring him into the presence of the Assyrian king when both the latter's guards and servants were out of reach.

In spite of misgivings, doubts, and fears he kept steadily on his way, and about mid-afternoon a few days later reached the crest of a hill whence he looked down and beheld Sennacherib's great encampment.

"The Assyrians are as the sands of the sea for multitude," murmured Uriel, amazed and disheartened when he perceived the vast extent and magnificence of the camp.



Confident in their strength to repel all comers, the Assyrians had not chosen a hill of difficult approach, but lay at rest in a wide, grassy, and well-watered valley, their encampment covering miles of ground. Near the centre Uriel observed a collection of large and gorgeously decorated tents, with banners and flags of many colors floating above and about them, and understood that here rested the royal household in luxurious seclusion. He could see also that soldiers swarmed like ants at various points, and did not fail to observe the captains of the hosts and lords of the court as they drove about in gilded chariots drawn by splendid horses.

The sight was one to fill the Assyrian with joy and pride, and the Hebrew with grief and fear. After the

first few moments of absorbed interest in the distant scene, Uriel became more depressed and disheartened than at any previous time. How useless for the broken people of Judah to contend with the mighty Assyrians! How mad to dream that the invaders could be put to flight by the death of their king at the hands of a Jew!

Then came a sudden revival of hope as the despairing youth remembered how in an earlier and happier time the king of the Moabites, looking down from a hill upon another great encampment, had called upon Balaam to curse, and was forced to hear the prophet bless instead: "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the

river's side, as the trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted, as cedar trees beside the waters."

As the words of this blessing upon his warlike ancestors came into his mind, Uriel repeated them aloud, deeply moved and standing forth incautiously with flushed cheeks, his eyes fixed defiantly upon the tents of the Assyrians.

It was at this moment that the decision whether to go forward or turn back was taken out of his hands. His ear had scarcely caught the sound of hurrying feet when he perceived that he was surrounded by some half-dozen Assyrian soldiers, who threatened him with uplifted weapons. Seeing that resistance was useless, Uriel checked his first impulse to fight his way from among them, and, without

laying a hand upon a weapon of his own, he stood still, signifying that he surrendered. His captors showed anger and seemed disposed to put him to death without delay.

“He is a spy,” said one, and others repeated: “A spy! A Jewish spy!”

“Thrust him through!” more than one demanded.

“Nay, not yet,” advised cooler heads. “The captains will desire to question him. Let us lead him to the camp.”

“I am no spy,” said Uriel in Assyrian, “but am here to beg leave to go before your king that I may give him news for which he will thank me.”

“Then thou art a traitor to thine own people.”

“Nay,” said Uriel, struggling to control his anger, “I am neither

traitor nor spy. I come to warn Sennacherib. It will be well for him if he heed my warning, and well for my people also."

"How can such things be? Thou art traitor or spy, and not to be trusted. Come! The captains of our hosts will decide thy fate."

They bound his hands behind him, then marched him down the hill and into the Assyrian camp, the nearer and more complete view of which caused the watchful captive greater despondency and concern than ever. Clearly these Assyrians were a mighty people and their king the war-lord of the world. Who could hope to prevail against them?

It was unfortunate for Uriel that the advance guard of the Assyrians sent to Jerusalem had returned only

the day before, bringing the news that King Hezekiah had dared to close his gates, had refused to receive Sennacherib's messengers in person, and had apparently disdained to send even an answer to "the lord of the earth, from Asshur sprung." It was not understood that Hezekiah really trembled at the name of Sennacherib, that his action was not the result of insolent defiance, but of hesitation while he awaited instruction and counsel from the prophet Isaiah. His silence was interpreted by the Assyrians as a contemptuous refusal to send his submission, and great was their wrath.

"Let Judah's king but wait till Sethos of Egypt hath kissed my feet," Sennacherib had cried, with scornful laughter. "I will make him

to repent a thousand times. Humiliation and heavy tribute are not enough. Even death would be too merciful. This time he shall follow me a captive to Assyria and serve among my slaves to the end of his days. I, Sennacherib, have spoken."

This speech was reported throughout the camp, and it pleased the angry thousands. Naturally the sight of a Jew was now likely to stir all the revengeful passions of the veterans and victors of many wars. Under other circumstances Uriel might have been looked upon as a harmless shepherd who had stolen near out of curiosity to look with wonder and fear upon the magnificent encampment of his country's enemies. But now the Assyrian mood was dangerous, and there could be little hope that

they would not promptly determine to deal with him as a spy.

Uriel was not slow to read his doom in the faces of the half-score of captains before whom he was led. An immediate court-martial was held in a large tent provided for such purposes, soldiers meanwhile massed in and about the doorway. A young noble and distinguished commander called Tartan advised delay, suggesting that it might interest Sennacherib to question the prisoner; and as he spoke it was evident that Uriel's comely face and dauntless eye had pleased him. But the proposal was opposed by Rab-Shakeh, another great lord, who was older and by nature less inclined to mercy. It was he who had carried Sennacherib's message to Jerusalem, and he was



now full of resentful feelings toward the Jewish king and people. All the captains except Tartan taking his view of the matter, sentence of immediate death was passed on Uriel.

When first he looked into the stern and pitiless eyes of his judges Uriel trembled inwardly and suffered as only the young and strong can suffer in the face of certain death. But he soon grew calm enough to look with something akin to scorn upon their hair and beards, which were all alike and all hanging in the same curls, divided and twisted with elaborate care. Could the men who indulged in such womanish vanity be world-conquerors after all? The strange fashions of the Assyrians seemed less offensive in Tartan, who was young and handsome. But if he had not

been on trial for his life, the captive would have laughed as he looked at Rab-Shakeh, whose face was far from comely, who was stout, and who was evidently growing old.

“Take me before your King,” said Uriel, boldly, as they still took counsel what to do. “I come to bring Sennacherib warning. The greatest of prophets hath spoken dire words concerning him.”

The youth scarcely hoped to escape with his life, but he now determined to do the deed he had proposed if he could gain admittance to Sennacherib. “Death would be easy,” was his thought, “if I could first rid my country of the oppressor.”

“Thou shalt not see the King,” Rab-Shakeh answered. “He hath no time to waste on vermin such as thou.

Hope not to deceive us. Thou art a Jew, and yet thou speakest the Assyrian. This is proof that thou art sent hither as a spy. Thou hast convicted thyself out of thine own mouth, and shalt die."

"Lead me first to Sennacherib," persisted Uriel. "I know that which he should hear—the word of the prophet Isaiah."

"Tell us what thou knowest, and the King shall hear it," said Tartan, fixing upon the captive a not unfriendly eye.

Uriel was silent, losing heart at this proposal.

"Aha, thou art again self-condemned!" cried Rab-Shakeh. "Prepare to die. We give thee one hour to commune with thy gods."

There was no dissenting voice, al-

though Tartan clearly was not satisfied, and Uriel surrendered hope. It was all over, then. His mission had failed. His death would not profit his country and would only bring lasting sorrow to his mother and his friends. Tears welled up in his eyes and rolled down his cheeks as he thought of the grief-stricken home in Jerusalem. To die thus ingloriously was hard, bitter. He had hoped to free his country from the oppressor, and then, if through some miracle of fortune he should be preserved, to return and be saluted as a hero by all his people, even as he had been saluted by the three old men ere they sent him forth from Jerusalem. But now—he had failed of his purpose and was to die unknown!

In those first few moments of despair

the mind of the unfortunate youth was filled with bitterness and with rebellion against the hard fate appointed for him. Why did not the God of Judah protect him? It was true he had at times been tempted with the thought of fame; but he well knew that his first impulse was unselfish, that his desire was solely to save his people and protect the holy Temple from the touch of profane hands. It was hard; it was bitter.

From such thoughts he tended gradually toward greater humility and resignation. He reminded himself that his persistence, after he knew the prophecy of Isaiah, was presumptuous, it might be even blasphemous, and that he should accept his present helpless situation as a merited rebuke. And the God of

Judah was the God of the dead as well as of the living. Death was not the end, and, living or dead, he was in the hands of God. Whatever his fate, should he not pray to be upheld by a willing and trusting spirit? He struggled hard to attain resignation, but he was so young—it was pitiful!

“Give me yon harp,” he said at last, his voice shaken with emotion.

Thinking that he would sing his death song, and respecting his wish, Tartan directed that a harp be brought from the farther side of the tent, and, taking it, he placed it in the captive’s outstretched hands.

The sun was setting and its red glow streamed across the bit of sky visible above the heads of the soldiers in the doorway, reminding Uriel that he was to see the glorious luminary

rise no more above his native hills. Shaken with suppressed sobs, the youth made haste to sweep his fingers over the harpstrings, and the sounds given forth were prompt to soothe and calm him.

Looking away from his enemies and thinking of his home in Jerusalem, he improvised a melody in a minor key; then accompanied himself as he sang in a voice of great beauty, and with deep feeling, the devout and hopeful words of the psalm of David which begins:

“ I lift up mine eyes unto the mountains,  
From whence cometh my help.”

It was a sight to move even the hearts of Assyrian conquerors—this fair youth standing on the brink of death, yet singing with the voice of an angel such words of hope and con-

fidence in his God. Some of the listening captains, particularly such as were acquainted with the Hebrew tongue, were visibly moved, and when the last note sounded Tartan said solemnly:

“Verily thou canst sing words to charm all gods in tones to charm all men. Sing more.”

So Uriel varied his minor melody to one even more touching—a very tragedy of supplication—and sang further, beginning thus:

“Hear my cry, O God, hearken to my prayer;  
From the end of the earth I call unto thee.  
When my heart faileth, when my soul fainteth,  
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

As he put down the harp and turned to them quietly and patiently, Uriel observed that several of the Assyrian captains spoke together in low



tones. Then Tartan called out so that all might hear:

“This Jew shall not die to-day. The King must see and hear him.”

“’Tis well said,” assented others. “Let him first sing his songs before the King, for the King loveth a singer such as he.”

“Thy life is given back to thee until to-morrow,” said Rab-Shakeh at last, reluctantly. “Then the King himself will consider thy case and pass judgment.”

“I thank thee,” said Uriel, as if in answer to Rab-Shakeh, but looking at Tartan, who wondered at his calm and patient manner at such a time.

“Guard him well,” said Tartan to the soldiers at the door, “but deal with him gently till ye have my word.”

## CHAPTER VI

### BEFORE THE ASSYRIAN KING

IN THE opinion of the Assyrian archers no prouder, more magnificent, or more impregnable camp had ever been seen by the eye of man, yet on a certain morning there was no comfort in this fact for its commander, the famed Sennacherib. In the guarded purlieus of the inner royal encampment, and in the great and gorgeous royal tent itself, instead of pride and satisfaction, there were now perplexity and gloom.

The King had dreamed an evil dream, which neither priests nor soothsayers could interpret; and after fruitless interviews with both, he lay prostrate among his silken

cushions, his hair undressed and his eyes bloodshot, oppressed with forebodings of some unknown and fearful calamity. He was now quite alone, having ordered all his comforters—even Rab-Saris, the chief eunuch—to depart.

But solitude had brought no relief. His depression, far from abating, had increased. The very silence seemed loud with mocking, accusing, threatening voices. So when a real voice was heard behind the gold-embroidered curtains of Tyrian purple, entreating that Tiglathi-Nin, the priest, might enter, the King answered, granting leave.

The curtains parted and a man of middle age, with a long curled beard and the flowing garments of a priest, entered the royal bed-chamber, pros-

trated himself on the carpeted ground, and, rising, begged leave to speak. Sennacherib's face was turned away and he did not stir, but he asked impatiently:

“Hast thou come to bring more guesses from the soothsayers? If so, return again and tell them that I know them for the impostors they are and will have a reckoning with them that they will long remember.”

“Nay, mighty King, not so. I come to entreat that thou wilt rise and wash thy face and eat and go forth. Let thy servants attire thee in the robes that become thy majesty. Partake of thy noblest wine and let there be music and dancing. Let thy handmaidens comfort thee. Go forth in thy chariot; look upon the multitude of thy tents and thy crowding

archers who cannot be numbered. Then the evil demon will depart from thee and thou wilt be thyself once more—the invincible king of men, from Asshur sprung.”

“I do not say thou hast not spoken well, Tiglathi-Nin,” replied Sennacherib; “but I loathe the thought of food and wine, of women I will have none, and to look upon the camp and the proofs of my power is but to behold mocking vanity. Leave me, therefore, to my evil affliction.”

“Deign to hear, O King,” persisted Tiglathi-Nin. “The report of thy distemper hath filled the whole camp with gloom, and the bravest men are low in spirit. Should the Egyptian and the Jew combine to attack us now, calamity might indeed overwhelm us.”

“And so the prophecy of my evil dream come to fulfilment.”

“Nay, say not so,” begged Tiglath-Nin. “Not all our dreams are the warnings of offended gods. Men say that the physicians of Egypt trace many evil dreams to a stomach too much distended by food and wine, and ’tis well known that a sickness may overtake that part of us even when we have not eaten heavily. Peradventure thy distemper is but an affliction of the body that will quickly pass.”

“Tiglath-Nin, I drink much wine, but, as thou knowest, I am not gluttonous. Thou speakest as though to a eunuch of bloated body who stuffs himself with food and fattens like the stalled ox.”

“Pardon, great King,” cried the

priest in haste, amazed that the "lord of the earth" should receive the suggestion so patiently. "I meant not so. Thou art young and slender and like an arrow for straightness. All men know that thy delight is in war, the chase, and wine—not food."

"What god or demon have I offended?" mused Sennacherib, still lying upon his side with face averted. "Would I could command the wisdom to interpret the things shown me in my dream."

"If thou wouldst deign to listen to another soothsayer," said Tiglath-Nin, "let me summon the young Jew. I hear from Tartan and Rab-Shakeh that this boy hath sworn that he can interpret thy dream."

"Who is he? one of my Jewish slaves?"

“Nay, he was brought a captive into the camp but yesterday. ’Tis said the captains would have slain him had he not played the harp and sung with such surpassing sweetness.”

A skilled harper and pretended soothsayer, yet but a boy? Sennacherib stirred and was plainly interested.

“Let him be brought before me,” he said. “If he cannot interpret my dream, his songs may please me. I have wished for new songs, for my harpers weary me with their repetitions. And if he hath the spirit of prophecy, he may, indeed, speak wisely; for I doubt not it is a god of this region that troubleth me, and the skill of a local prophet may be required. Let him come. Bring him quickly.”



“ I haste to do the will of my lord,” said Tiglathi-Nin, well pleased. And although the face of Sennacherib was still averted, the priest prostrated himself, touching his brow to the ground, and, having risen, walked backward out of the royal presence.

The displaced silken hangings fell together again, and the Assyrian king was once more left alone, screened from the view of all eyes. Though his bed-chamber was in a tent and part of a movable camp, it more than suggested the rude magnificence of an oriental court of that period. The curtains of the four sides were of wool and silk, richly embroidered with gold and silver threads, forming here and there the figures of men and beasts in war and hunting scenes. There were couches, tables, and chairs

inlaid with ivory and gold, coverlets of knitted peacock plumes, vessels of gold, footstools of ebony adorned with mother-of-pearl, and the blue canopy over the bed glittered with gems.

When Tiglathi-Nin again presented himself Sennacherib had risen, seated himself among the scarlet cushions of a cedar couch, and his face was no longer averted. It was the handsome yet strong and determined face of a man still in the prime of his youth. All this was clear at a glance in spite of the suffering and perplexity suggested by the frown that wrinkled his brow and the expression of mingled sadness and fear in his eyes. He looked up eagerly as the priest entered and bowed before him.

“My lord, the young Jew waits without.”

“Summon him.”

The heavy curtains parted at the call of Tiglathi-Nin, and the captive stood before his judge.

“What is thy name?”

“Uriel.”

“What dost thou here?”

“I am a captive in thy camp, and have heard report of thy evil dream. Peradventure I can interpret it, having heard within but a few days a sure prophecy concerning thee. Therefore I begged to be brought before thee.”

“Then thou art not thyself a sooth-sayer?”

“Nay, my lord. As thou seest, I am but a youth.”

“But not too young to be a spy.”

“Hear, O King, I came not to spy upon and carry reports of thy defenses—”

“ Yet ’tis said my captains would have slain thee as a spy hadst thou not sung surpassing well. Before I question thee further, sing to me the song that saved thy life.”

A harp was brought and Uriel willingly obeyed, singing the hymn to God upon “ the mountains.” Invited to continue, he rendered the touching supplication of the poor human creature, beset with trouble and fear, who cried out to his God “ from the end of the earth,” beseeching that when his heart failed utterly he might be led to “ the rock that is higher than I.” From the outset the youth sang with deep feeling, but as hope and confidence rose within him from the influence of the music and words of his song he felt strangely uplifted, and there was more than deep feel-

ing, there was exultation, in his tones. David's song of deliverance from his enemies became almost a shout of triumph in the mouth of Uriel. The confiding youth forgot Hezekiah's weakness and Sennacherib's strength, and he looked like one inspired as he sang: "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler and the horn of my salvation, my high tower."

Sennacherib was no less moved than his captains had been, but more by the beauty of the singer's voice, his grace and winning manner, than by his theme. The latter impressed him, however, for turning to Tiglath-Nin he said:

"Behold a mortal such as the gods approve." Then to Uriel: "Thy

gods should be well pleased with thee."

"I hope, but dare not believe that He may be," was the answer with downcast eyes.

"And which of the gods of thy people is it that thou dost so reverence?"

"My people acknowledge but one God, and there is none other."

"Strange!" cried Sennacherib, and then he smiled. "Thy people are poor and weak, indeed, if they have but one god. We of Assyria have thousands. Even the Egyptians have gods in great numbers."

"They are not gods, but the vain imaginations of men, or—it may be—spirits of evil."

"What sayest thou?" demanded Sennacherib sharply, although he listened with amused tolerance. "A

strange people are these Jews," he remarked to Tiglathi-Nin, then turned again to Uriel: "What is the name of this thy one God?"

"We know His name, but do not speak it, for it is holy."

"I have heard the name," said Tiglathi-Nin. "It is Jehovah."

"What will ye do," asked Sennacherib, "when I have taken away from your temples the images and holy vessels of Jehovah? What will be left you if ye have no other god? Knowest thou not that I take not only whole nations captive but their gods also? For the gods follow their images and holy vessels to Nineveh, and thus I add continually to the number of the gods of Assyria."

Uriel turned pale and looked on the ground.

“ Pardon, O King,” he said after some moments of visible agitation, “ but I beg that thou wilt speak of other things. I fear to listen to words of such blasphemy. If a Jew spoke thus he would be stricken by a bolt from heaven, but thou—pardon, great King—thou knowest not what thou sayest. The one God of Judah is the only God of heaven and the whole earth.”

Sennacherib laughed aloud.

“ Yet He fled in fear of me and my father! Where was He when I shut your king in Jerusalem, took forty-six of your fenced towns, and carried away two hundred thousand of your people captive? Where was He when my father, the great Sargon, took the ten tribes of Israel from Samaria and scattered them broadcast the earth? ”



“He was, as men say, asleep,” sadly answered Uriel. “He abandoned us because of our sins, but when we have atoned He will avenge us as He so often did aforetime.”

“Thou art young and innocent and hast faith in a fable; but I would not rob thee of the poor comfort such faith may give thee, for thou hast pleased me.”

“I thank my lord, the King,” said Uriel, humbly.

“It is a fable, and yet,” continued Sennacherib, “some god or demon of this region hath troubled me in my sleep. I am sprung from Asshur, god of gods. He is lord of heaven, I am lord of earth, and there is no war between us; yet some fell influence hath troubled my soul. This is strange, indeed. I will tell thee of my evil

dream, and if so be thou canst interpret it thou shalt have thy reward."

So Uriel stood in silence and listened to the strange recital of the King of Assyria.

## CHAPTER VII

### SENNACHERIB'S DREAM

“IN THE midst of the night,” began Sennacherib, “I dreamed a fearful dream of blood and smoke and fire and death. I seemed to stand upon a lofty hill whence I could see my proud encampment stilled in sleep. And as I looked, lo, there went up a mournful sound of groans or cries that seemed to come from the four quarters of the world. It filled me with the anguish of despair, for methought I heard the sigh of the gods themselves who mourned over the calamity appointed for the Assyrian hosts. It came again, this mournful cry, and then in sweating agony I heard a mighty roar that seemed to

split the very world in twain. And, lo, the heavens opened wide and fire rained out upon this camp—not gently like the rain on forest lands in summer time, but in vast torrents wreathed in sulphurous smoke, which shook and blinded me. The jarring thunders, the maddening glare, the black and deadly clouds, begat such throes of fear that I, even I, the king of men, fell prone upon the ground bereft of sense or feeling like the dead.

“Anon I seemed to live again, and, lo, I stood within the confines of the camp itself and looked on fire and smoke and death, on shrieking women, fleeing men, wild snorting horses, and chariots overturned and wrecked. All fled before a mottled, copper cloud of flaming fire and eddy-

ing smoke that moved low on the ground, blasting whatever it touched with death. My proudest legions fell before it like yellowed sedge before devouring flame, and when it passed, lo, I beheld their blasted corpses thickly strewn across far black and smoking vistas.

“ This vision faded, and methought I lay alone and desolate in a barren land, bowed to the earth by the knowledge that my army was destroyed and my empire wrested from me. I cried aloud to Asshur and he heard me not. I called on Anu, Hoa, Sin, Shamas, Bel, Nergal, Nin, and begged that if I had offended the least one of the four thousand gods of the earth and sky, my sin should be uncovered before mine eyes that I might make atonement. But there was no answer, and

the silence smote me as if with a mighty club. I grovelled miserably on the ground, I fainted from terror of the unseen powers that overwhelmed me—and so awoke.

“Now, what mean these sorrowful visions, these unknown humiliations, that have afflicted in his sleep the greatest of earthly kings?”

The eyes of both the Assyrian monarch and Tiglathi-Nin, the priest, were now fastened upon Uriel, who had stood and listened with growing interest and excitement.

“They mean,” said he, “if the King permit free speech, that thy hosts are doomed and that thou wilt curse the day when thou didst lift thy hand against Jerusalem. Thy dream is but the prophecy of Isaiah in another form.”

“What saith this Hebrew prophet?”

“He saith that Judah's God hath promised to send a blast upon thee—”

“A ‘blast’?” echoed Sennacherib. “It was a fiery blast that in my dream descended on this camp. But there are no such blasts outside of dreams. The only blast the men of this region have to fear is the simoon from the southern deserts. Such hot wind may torture us with heat and thirst and the breathing of desert dust, but it can bring no death-dealing blast of fire.”

“I know not the nature of this coming ‘blast,’” said Uriel, “but come it will, I know, as surely as the stars will travel on unwearied in their courses. Therefore, get thee up and flee, O King, while there is time.”

The youth spoke as one inspired, and his listeners, half believing, were thrilled with momentary fear. Sennacherib made haste to ask:

“Said the Hebrew prophet no more?”

“Ay, he said that our mighty God had promised to put a hook in thy nose and a bridle in thy lips, and that He would turn thee back by the way which thou camest.”

“What sayest thou?” cried Sennacherib, starting to his feet, and by his threatening manner causing Uriel to retreat backward. “Am I a vile slave, am I a brute beast, to be thus scorned and mocked?”

“Hear, O King,” cried Uriel. “I have but spoken at thy bidding and told thee truly all I have heard, that thou mightest be warned.”



“By Asshur! I will have this insolent prophet's life,” vowed the Assyrian king. “I will track him to his lair, and let him taste the blast of a fiery furnace more real than that with which he dares to threat me. And King Hezekiah—not I—shall have a hook in his nose and a bridle in his lips, as he doth follow me on foot to Nineveh. As for the puny god of this rebellious land, I defy and curse him and will raze his temples to the ground.”

At these last words, spoken in loud and furious tones, Uriel turned away his eyes, covering his ears with his hands, while the Assyrian priest fearfully and hurriedly interposed.

“I rejoice to see that the King of men is himself once more,” said Tiglath-Nin, “but I pray that he will

not in his anger curse the least of gods, for even the least of gods have power to strike in sudden and unforeseen ways. And visit not thy wrath, I beg of thee, upon this boy, who hath spoken at thy command as best he could, and, indeed, hath done well to warn thee."

"I bear him no ill-will and would do him no hurt," said Sennacherib, at once diverted and his anger cooling. "Nay," he added, resuming his seat, "I am well pleased with him, and if he will but be faithful to me, riches and honors shall be his."

"This captive Jew?" cried Tiglath-Nin, amazed.

"Even he. It is my wish that he stay beside me, not as a captive slave, but as a sweet musician, ay, and as a friend, and some day as a valued

counsellor. Uriel, wilt thou be faithful to me for the good-will I bear thee and for all that I will do for thee?"

"My lord, the King, is too good to his servant," said Uriel, evasively, much troubled.

"Take him," said Sennacherib to the priest, "and give orders that he be clothed in fine raiment and made ready to go with me as I drive forth to view the camp."

Tiglathi-Nin perceived that the captive youth had won his way to the heart of the Assyrian monarch, who was given to sudden attachments; and he well knew that objection from any quarter would be worse than useless, but he nevertheless made bold to utter a word of caution.

"Nay,—if the King permit free speech,—go not too fast in this affair.

Let the young Jew's fidelity first be tested."

"I have spoken," replied Sennacherib with a final air that could not be mistaken.

Turning away, he sounded a gong—the signal for the coming of his eunuchs to bathe and dress him for the day; and as the priest and the youth bowed themselves out, he looked earnestly at his own face reflected upon the highly polished surface of a plate of silver which served him as a mirror.

But Tiglathi-Nin spoke his mind more freely as he led the new favorite to an adjoining tent. "The King finds pleasure in thy music, in thy fair youth, and in thy speech," he said, "and will deal well with thee. But remember that though he may

see innocence and good faith in thine eye, others will not trust thee. Thou art a stranger and a Jew. Remember that when thou art near the King unseen eyes will keep sleepless watch upon thee, and if thou dost lift thy hand against Sennacherib, that moment an arrow will pierce thy heart. Thou art warned."

Uriel shuddered and turned sick, not because of the dangers that beset him, but because of his secret design against a king who had so favored him.

The tent into which he was led, and which he was told to call his own during the King's pleasure, was hung with Tyrian purple and richly furnished, being a part of the inner royal camp. He noted this indifferently and submitted with an absent air, al-

most believing that he dreamed, as the robes of an Assyrian noble were put upon him and his attendants set before him sumptuous food brought from the King's own table, much of which he knew he might not eat without offending against the customs of his people.

He had prospered beyond his fondest hopes. He would have free access to the King and would no doubt soon find the opportunity he sought. And yet the accomplishment of his design appeared more than ever difficult. He had expected a fierce and cruel tyrant who could be hated on sight, but had found instead a kindly monarch who wished to be a friend. Sennacherib was, indeed, a blasphemer, but was it not through ignorance? He was a proud world-conqueror, desir-

ing all nations to bow before him, but what more could be expected of the son of the great Sargon? Uriel was sorely troubled.

“ Yet though I love him,” cried the youth within himself at last, “ still will I strike him for my country’s sake. But, oh, that I might slay him in battle and not by stealth! ”

## CHAPTER VIII

### A SLAVE SET FREE

ABOUT mid-afternoon Uriel was summoned to the royal tent, and there found Sennacherib ready to drive forth and review his archers. Every trace of anxiety and gloom had left him, and he greeted the favored youth with cheerful smiles.

“The demon is exorcised,” he said. “Whether the sacrifices to Asshur brought relief, or whether my anger against thy prophet and thy King restored me to myself, I know not. But I no longer fear, and my purpose to humble Hezekiah of Judea and Sethos of Egypt is stronger than before. Thy country I have sworn to subdue, but to thee in person, Uriel,



I will make amends by raising thee to a place of honor near my throne, for thou dost please me well. When the war is done, thou shalt go with me to Nineveh and become my most favored minister."

"Nay, my lord," begged Uriel, "rather let me go as thy slave if thou wilt spare my country."

"For such a spirit I like thee all the more. Would that I might have sons like unto thee. But fear not, Uriel, I will soon teach thee to forget that thou art a Jew and to be glad of my favor."

But Uriel turned away from the smile of the King, and answered solemnly:

"Never can I forget that I am a son of Judah or that the God of Israel is my God. And who can promise, O

King, that thy gracious favor will outlast the year? I cannot become an Assyrian and will soon provoke thy wrath."

"Fear not, Uriel," gently urged Sennacherib. "Already I have listened without anger to words of thine which no Assyrian would dare utter. But come now with me and I shall show thee how great is my power."

The whole Assyrian camp was amazed to see the Jewish captive in the chariot of the King. The white Lybian horses were driven by Nebo, the royal charioteer, but Uriel alone stood in attendance behind the King's chair, holding the royal parasol, and it was observed that Sennacherib often turned partly round to speak with him. Such honor conferred upon a Jew displeased all who wit-

nessed it, but not even the nobles dared give expression to their disapproval. Yet the King might have heard loud murmurs, had it not been seen that the armed guards following the royal car on horseback kept their eyes fixed watchfully on Uriel. Sennacherib also knew and approved of this precaution. Charmed by Uriel's singing, his beauty, frankness, and bravery, and uncommonly interested in all that he said, Sennacherib nevertheless remembered that he was one of an abused race and, though believing in him, wished to see him tested.

As they made the round of the great encampment, the legions drawn up for review on either side, Uriel was surprised to see that the spearmen and archers dropped on their knees to give the salute, rising only

when the King passed on. The cavalry kept their seats, but bowed low over the necks of their horses.

“See how they honor me,” said Sennacherib. “The proudest are but dust beneath my feet.”

“But when thou ledest them to battle,” said Uriel in wonder, “what time is there for tributes such as these?”

“Then I am a warrior and commander only—not a king.”

At a point where the soldiers were drawn up for review in greatest numbers Sennacherib stopped his chariot and briefly addressed them.

“Pass the word of my mouth throughout the camp,” he commanded. “Let all my fighting men know that I have recovered from my distemper, and therefore proclaim a

day of thanksgiving and feasting. Tomorrow early let our altars smoke with sacrifices, then let all eat, drink, and be merry. And the day after we shall advance upon our enemies and make haste to crush them."

This announcement was received with acclamations, evidently pleasing all.

"One more word have I to say at this time," continued Sennacherib. "I would have all men know that Uriel, the young Jew at my side, is the King's friend, that he is free to come and go within the camp, that the honors due an Assyrian noble are his, and that ye are to lift no restraining hand against him unless he attempt to go abroad without my written passport. He is free in all things except to leave me."

No approving cries greeted this startling announcement. Instead there were low murmurs among the soldiers not in the front ranks, and only those immediately facing Sennacherib were heard to say: "Live forever, O King, and let thy will be done." Even these showed no enthusiasm.

Uriel saw no friendly eye in all that throng. He knew that he was not merely suspected as a possible spy, but despised as a foreigner by the soldiers, and doubted not that the King's sudden fancy for a stranger filled the nobles with secret wrath. Boy though he was, he foresaw that no sooner should he begin to lose favor with the King than these jealous courtiers would come forward and accuse him to his ruin. He was glad when the

order was given for the royal chariot to move on, and he remained no longer the victim of that cold, unfriendly stare.

In the construction of his great works at Nineveh, such as palaces and temples, Sennacherib used chiefly the forced labor of captive peoples—Chaldeans, Jews, Egyptians, Elamites, and Ethiopians. These moulded bricks, built and decorated great edifices, excavated canals, constructed embankments, raised great mounds, and transported and elevated the colossal man-headed and winged bulls and lions of stone, emblems of the greater Assyrian deities. Over each gang of foreign slaves were set a number of taskmasters, who urged on the work with whips or staves. Sennacherib himself, it is said, often

drove out in his chariot and observed the progress of the work.

Many of these foreign slaves accompanied the present expedition in order to carry loads and perform menial service in camp. Large numbers of them were now engaged in excavating a drain, all the Jews being kept in fetters as a precaution against attempted escape. And, as was the custom at Nineveh, their taskmasters stood over them with whips. Thus the royal party found them, for after passing beyond the point where the soldiers were massed for review, Sennacherib directed his charioteer to drive to the scene of the excavation.

It was as they neared the spot that Uriel's opportunity came. Loud cries and the sound of blows came from one of the gangs at work on the drain, and



in a moment a fettered slave struggled painfully from among his fellows and into full view, followed by a taskmaster raining blows upon his bare back. The attention of both the King and his guards was thus attracted and for the moment held.

A quick, sharp look at the latter assured Uriel that he could now strike the blow before any arrow could stay him, and his trembling hand clutched the dagger in his bosom. A moment more and the deed might have been done. But as the tortured slave turned his face fully toward the King Uriel forgot both his secret mission and his opportunity to carry it to completion. With a cry he leaped from the chariot, ran forward, struck the taskmaster a terrible blow, and clasped the tottering slave in his arms.

Even the King was silent in the presence of a scene so strange: a bent old man with whitened locks and beard, his wrinkled face grimy and streaked with tears, his ankles gripped in the shackles of a slave, weak, miserable, shrinking, clothed in filthy rags—yet held tenderly to the breast of the noble youth just crowned with the King's favor and clothed in soft and rich attire.

“Weep no more,” sobbed Uriel.  
“He shall not hurt thee!”

“Pardon, my lord, that I fell against thee,” begged the bewildered old man, shrinking away from his rescuer.

“Art thou gone mad, good Uriel?” asked Sennacherib, amazed.

“Not mad, but broken-hearted,” said Uriel in husky tones, as he

turned toward the King, still supporting the unsteady form of the old man. "Look, O King, upon this wretched, bruised creature! Behold what thou hast made of a princely man once honored of all Jerusalem. The blood of the flaming royal line of David is in his veins—and see him now!"

The youth halted in his speech, unable to master his emotions.

"Let me go, my lord," cried the old man, struggling, as he caught the angry eye of the taskmaster, who had recovered from the blow and risen to his feet. "Let me go to my work that the lash fall not upon me."

"Who is he?" asked Sennacherib.  
"He doth not know thee."

"He is Naphtali, my father, whom thou didst drag a captive to Assyria.

He doth not know me because cruel usage hath broken him in body and wrecked him in mind. That I should live to see this day!" cried Uriel, his sobs uncontrolled as he clasped his father closer and kissed him.

"What would my lord? Let me go ere the lash again bite into my flesh!" cried the wreck of poor Naph-tali.

"I grieve that thou shouldst see him thus," said Sennacherib, much moved. "Weep not, Uriel. If he is thy father he shall work as a slave no more. I give him to thee. Peradventure kind usage will restore him."

Uriel turned upon the King a grateful eye, but struggled to speak in vain. Sennacherib then addressed the wondering guards:

"Take off the shackles from this

man. Let him be bathed and dressed in soft raiment. Then convey him to the tent of Uriel and bid the physicians attend him with all their skill. As for thee,"—turning to the frightened taskmaster,—“thou hast done more than thy duty because of thy cruel heart, and thou shalt receive the punishment that befits thee ere the sun goes down.”

“O King,” cried the terrified taskmaster upon his knees with hands outstretched, “what is my sin before thee that thou seekest my life?”

“I seek not thy life, but the lash shall fall upon thy back in turn. I have spoken.” Having ordered the immediate arrest of the taskmaster, the King turned once more to Uriel: “Until thy father is made fit to enter thy tent come thou with me and fear not.”

“My lord, the King, is good,” sobbed Uriel, releasing his hold on his father and allowing two of the guards to take him in charge.

“Why dost thou still weep?” inquired Sennacherib, as the chariot returned toward the royal encampment. “Thou shouldst now be content, my Uriel.”

“I weep because I begin to love thee—I that should hate thee as the oppressor of my country.”

And the “lord of the earth” was not offended, and only smiled.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE QUARREL OF TARTAN AND RAB-SHAKEH

IT WAS Sennacherib's custom to hear and pass upon complaints in person whenever trouble arose among those of his nobles who would not have been willing to appear before inferior magistrates. Even when at war and far from Nineveh he was often called upon to act thus as judge. Returning from his drive, he now found that Tartan and Rab-Shakeh were in dispute, and requested that they might come before him in his council chamber. Thither he went, therefore, and seated in his high throne chair, with Uriel and a few attendants standing near, he inquired into the merits of the case.

Tartan and Rab-Shakeh were the lordly messengers who had been sent with an army to Jerusalem, and Uriel recognized them as two of the captains before whom he was taken on his arrival in the camp. They had already stood before the King with the report of their failure to secure the submission of Hezekiah, and now came for judgment in a matter which concerned them personally.

They related that on the army's return in scattered detachments from Jerusalem a beautiful little Jewish girl had been taken captive and had but that day been brought into the camp. Both Tartan and Rab-Shakeh laid claim to her as soon as they saw her, and hence the dispute which the King alone could settle. Being told to speak, the two nobles did so in turn.



“ I claim her,” said Rab-Shakeh, “ because I am the elder and higher officer, because it was I that delivered the King’s message to Hezekiah’s minister, and because as the King’s delegate my authority was superior to that of the mere military commander of the expedition. Tartan has no claim; the child is rightly mine.”

“ It is true,” said Tartan, “ that I was the ‘ mere commander ’ of the expedition, that the captains looked to me for orders, and that I was responsible to the King for the safety of his messenger, Rab-Shakeh. But Rab-Shakeh had no authority over anything but the message entrusted to him. If the soldiers under me took captives, the matter concerned not Rab-Shakeh, but me only, and the captives or spoils that I required from

my soldiers were mine or the King's, not Rab-Shakeh's. Is this not reason? "

" 'Tis not reason, 'tis madness," interrupted Rab-Shakeh, but was checked by a sign from the King.

"It is true," continued Tartan, smiling, "that Rab-Shakeh is the elder, much the elder. He is also much the heavier, much the bigger about the middle, and a few years hence he will be tottering toward the grave. But does not this make his claim weaker instead of stronger? The captive is but a child, and ere she hath become a woman, he will be too old to care for her; he will die and leave her to strangers."

"My lord, I do protest," cried the furious Rab-Shakeh, but Sennacherib permitted Tartan to continue.

“ Yet I do not claim her because I am younger than Rab-Shakeh, but for the good reasons stated, and because my palace will be the brighter for the presence of so pretty a little slave.”

“ I wonder that ye so dispute for the possession of a child,” said Sennacherib. “ Is her beauty then of such great promise? Send for her that I may see her.”

At this both Tartan and Rab-Shakeh looked uneasy, each no doubt fearing that the King, when he saw the little captive, would end the dispute by taking her as his own. Uriel also seemed excited, breathing hard and looking eagerly toward the door. His suspense was not prolonged. The captive soon appeared, and, as he had hoped and feared by turns, proved to be little Josepha.

Uriel suppressed a cry as he saw her, and waited, breathless. The child did not see him where he stood among the attendants, her frightened glance being fixed upon the King and wandering thence to the two lords who claimed her. It was evident that she came unwillingly, and her face wore a weary, pained, uncomprehending expression. Yet her beauty and grace were, as ever, apparent to the most careless eye.

“I wonder not that ye dispute for possession of her,” said the King. “She is fair, indeed. Who art thou, little one?”

But Josepha, not understanding the Assyrian, made no answer. “Let me go home—let me go home,” she begged in her native tongue.

“Speak to her in the Hebrew, Uriel, and question—”

The King was interrupted by a scream of delight from Josepha, who rushed into Uriel's arms and clung to him, calling aloud his name.

"How is this?" asked Sennacherib, when the child's exhibitions of joy were more subdued. "Thou knowest her, Uriel? Who is she?"

"She is Josepha, daughter of Gamaliel, a merchant of Jerusalem."

"Is she akin to thee?"

"Nay, my lord, but her mother, if she yet live, is my friend, and I buried her father after he was robbed of his goods and slain on the highway by the Assyrians that went up to Jerusalem."

Then Uriel added with slow distinctness:

"It was her mother's wish that this child should be my wife after the needful years have passed."

“Ah, is it indeed so?” Sennacherib looked inquiringly at the two Assyrian lords, who now regarded Uriel with no friendly eye.

“What of her mother?” asked the youth, eagerly, looking from Tartan to Rab-Shakeh. “She was taken away in the same night by members of the same Assyrian band.”

Neither of the Assyrian lords deigned to answer until the King repeated the question.

“I saw her not, but word reached me of such a woman,” Tartan then replied. “It is said that she died by her own hand within an hour of her capture.”

Uriel checked a cry of grief and drew Josepha closer to him, glad that she could not understand. The King frowned.

“There is but one thing to do,” said Sennacherib to the Assyrian lords. “I gave no order to take captives among the Jews or seize their goods before the answer of Hezekiah was received. Therefore such deeds were not lawful. Moreover, even had they been lawful, I could now do no other than give this child to Uriel to whom she is betrothed.”

“O King,” cried Uriel, “thou art not alone great, thou art good, thou art just, and I thank thee from my heart.”

But anger and rebellion showed on the faces of Tartan and Rab-Shakeh. They counted the promise of Joseph's mother to Uriel as nothing, and were amazed that Sennacherib should risk the secret enmity of his two most powerful lords in order fur-

ther to please a captive Jew already so greatly favored. But while Rab-Shakeh openly scowled at Uriel, Tartan was quick to recover his self-possession and accept the King's ruling with apparent cheerfulness.

"If I am to be denied," he laughed, "I would as lief the Jew had her as Rab-Shakeh. Indeed, it is more fit. When she is old enough to wed he will not be too old or too fat, and he can charm her with his songs. The King has done well."

Rab-Shakeh now turned his angry eyes upon Tartan, and then bowed low before the King's signal of dismissal; but as they went forth, the look he cast upon the triumphant Uriel was a declaration, more plain than spoken words, that he intended war to the death, and would watch sleeplessly for his opportunity to strike.



## CHAPTER X

### JOSEPHA AND NAPHTALI

WITH the King's permission Uriel shortly returned to his tent, leading little Josepha by the hand. There he found Naphtali, his father. The old man had been bathed and dressed in "soft raiment," his beard and hair had been trimmed, healing oil had been poured on his wounds, the attending physician had given him a soothing potion, and he had been put to sleep on a luxurious couch.

"This is my father, Naphtali," said Uriel to Josepha, noting these changes and rejoiced to find that the poor old man now seemed more himself.

Naphtali stirred, his eyes opened,

and seeing Uriel he rose in great haste and bowed low before him.

“Pardon, my lord, if I have sinned,” he begged. “I know not why they placed me here. Give me my spade and I shall work.”

Uriel sighed deeply and turning to Josepha explained: “He was carried a captive to Assyria, and cruel usage hath caused him to forget all former things. He doth not know even me, his son.”

“Do not let them beat me,” begged Naphtali, his frightened eyes wandering uneasily around the richly-furnished tent.

“Sit thee down and be content. No one will dare hurt thee, for thou art no longer a slave,” said Uriel, gently forcing the old man to return to the couch. “The King hath given thee

to me, and I am thy son who loveth thee. Dost thou not remember thy little son, Uriel?"

"Let me go, my lord, that the task-masters set not upon me in their anger."

"O my poor father!"

Joseph ran into Naphtali's arms and kissed him, whereat the pained expression on his face relaxed and he smiled faintly. He put his hand on the girl's head and looked at her intently.

"Do I see aright?" he mused. "Is it no passing dream?" He glanced shrinkingly at Uriel, then looked again steadily at the child as she leaned against him where he sat on the couch. "Hath my prayer for death been answered and do I live the life to come, or is this a divine angel

sent in pity to comfort a wretched slave? ”

“ Thou seest no angel,” smiled Josepha, “ but only a little girl who like thee hath been a captive among the Assyrians. Be not afraid, for now we are safe with Uriel.” She kissed the bewildered old man again, and he pressed her to him, smiling.

“ Thou art his best medicine,” said Uriel, much comforted.

Food was now brought by the attendants and placed on a table in the centre of the tent. Two pompous eunuchs stood and served the meal, which was brought by underlings from the King’s kitchen. The great Rab-Saris, the King’s chief eunuch, had himself given orders for these elaborate arrangements. Uriel knew how greatly he was honored, but both

he and his "two children" would have been better pleased if they had been left to serve themselves when once the food was brought. The youth feared the effect of the servants' presence upon his father; but Josephah now readily led Naphtali to the table, bidding him sit beside her, and under her influence he remained calm for some little time, evidently finding great satisfaction in the appetizing food. The demented man would have eaten anything put before him, but Uriel saw to it that neither his father nor Josephah touched such dishes as the laws of his nation bade him reject.

"Would my father were here also—and my mother," said Josephah in sudden sadness. "Where are they now, Uriel? Are they together, thinkest thou?"

“I know they are safe from the Assyrians ere now,” was the quick answer. “Grieve not to think of them. When it is pleasing to the good God, thine eyes shall look upon them once more.”

He was silent, adding only in thought: “But may many, many years roll by before that day.” He could not tell her the real truth as yet. “Until then,” he continued, “let me be to thee both a father and a mother. And some day I may be more. It was thy mother’s wish that I should wed thee when thou art become a woman—if,” he added, smiling, “thou art willing.”

“Oh, I am glad!” cried Josepha, welcoming the plan with a child’s enthusiasm. “For thou art tall and beautiful and brave and good. When wilt thou marry me, Uriel?”

“When six years have passed, it may be. When thou art become a woman—when thy years are six and ten and mine are three and twenty.”

“Must it be so long?” asked Josepha, as seriously as if he had said a quarter of a century. “Wilt thou wait for me six years and have no wife till then? Can a man wait so long?”

“If he must,” smiled Uriel. “Jacob served seven years for Rachel, you remember.

“But there was Leah.”

“This time there will be no Leah.”

Calling for a harp, Uriel swept his hands over the strings, saying: “This is what I shall sing to thee out of Solomon’s Song when the Assyrians have been driven from our land, when all is well, and when the six years

have gone by.” Then he chanted softly:

“My beloved spake and said unto me,  
Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away,  
For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and  
gone,  
The flowers appear upon the earth,  
The time of the singing birds is come,  
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.  
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.”

The singing affected Naphtali strangely, seeming to stir tender, dormant memories, yet filling him with fear. He was seen to tremble and cast frightened glances about him, and when the last note was sounded he started up and ran from the table, crying:

“Let me go! If they find me here the lash will fall upon me!”

Uriel sat still, sorrow clouding his face, which the moment before had



shone with the brightness of his hopes. But Joseph ran quickly after Naphtali, quieted him by a touch, and led him back smiling as she would have led a child.

“Sit thee down,” she commanded gently, “and I will give thee to drink.”

“Thou art wiser than thy years,” commented Uriel, “and it is sweet to see thee care for my poor father thus.”

A sudden and profound sadness overwhelmed the youth as he recalled the purpose which had brought him to the camp of the Assyrians. What would become of Naphtali and Joseph if he did the deed? Would they not at the best be carried as slaves to Assyria? He was willing to sacrifice his own life—as to this he

never wavered. But could he send his father back to foreign slavery and deliver sweet Josepha to become the plaything of an Assyrian satrap? After all, was he sure that his country would profit by the death of Sennacherib at the hand of a Jew? Instead of retreating, might not the Assyrians visit upon all Judea the horrors of a terrible revenge?

Uriel turned abruptly away from the smiling Josepha and her pacified charge. He retired to an inner apartment of the tent, and there battled with his perplexities. Should he do the deed and take the consequences, terrible as they were, or withhold his hand—making a friend of the King for the sake of Naphtali and Josepha? And at this a thought came to him that filled him with shame:

Would David have hesitated to slay Goliath for fear of evil that might befall his family?

“Nay, I will not waver, but will strike the blow for my country,” he cried aloud, “trusting in the merciful providence of God.”

He decided immediately to act on the following night. There could be no better time, he thought, than when the camp slept heavily after a day of feasting and drinking. Then perhaps the death of the King might not become known till morning, and meanwhile might he not through great good fortune escape with Josepha and Naphtali? For even the guards on the borders of the camp would perhaps be found in a drunken sleep toward morning.

But whether escape were possible

or impossible, the deed should nevertheless be done. He had decided, and told himself solemnly that he would no more waver.

Uriel parted the curtains at the back entrance to his tent and looked out on the night, gazing up at the stars as if in search of inspiration, hope, and courage. From the tent's front entrance thousands of others were to be seen, but from the point where the youth now stood the view embraced only the upward slope of a hill to the right and a tree-embowered glen tending downward and away on the left. The great encampment virtually ended at this point, for on the upward slope to the right only two small tents were visible, presumably for the use of the sentinels chosen to watch on this the south-

eastern border. As he looked searchingly about, taking note of all this, Uriel located the figure of one of these sentinels moving on his rounds.

He doubted not that the glen also was watched, or that there was an outer or more distant picket line. Nevertheless he recognized that the path of escape on the following night—if escape were possible—would lead from the back entrance of his tent to the downward sloping glen, and thence into the hills and forests beyond.

## CHAPTER XI

### SENNACHERIB'S FEAST

IN THE morning early the smoke of sacrifices went up throughout the camp. Each captain, as ordered, made a burnt-offering in honor of Nergal and Hoa, gods of war, and thus was slain a great and costly sacrifice of sheep and goats and cattle.

Within the limits of the royal encampment Sennacherib himself offered sacrifices to the war gods named, but, as always, uttered his words of chiefest praise in honor of Asshur, the king of Assyrian deities. Special invocations were also addressed to Shamas, the sun-god; Sin, the moon-god; Vul, the god of the thunderbolt; Nin, the god of hunt-

ing; Bel, the patron god of Nineveh; and even to Beltis, the "great mother," and Ishtar, the goddess of love. A concluding petition embraced the gods in general, some four thousand altogether; for on the eve of battle the good-will of the least of these was valued. Tiglathi-Nin and other priests stood by Sennacherib's side, chanting mournfully, as he poured out oblations of nectar and wine before a golden altar brought from Nineveh.

None yet knew whether Sennacherib would move against Judea or Egypt, though at the outset there had been a rumor that he would punish Sethos before he humbled Hezekiah "in the dust"; but the order had gone forth that on the morrow camp should be broken and the march be-

gun. And so, with the hazards of war immediately before them, the Assyrian soldiers stood solemn and prayerful in the presence of the great sacrifice.

But when these duties of religion were performed and the King proclaimed a feast, solemnity gave place to laughter, and during the remainder of the day and until far into the night the camp was a continuing scene of merriment—singing, feasting, dancing, drinking. The female camp-followers were very numerous, each captain having so far as possible followed the example of the King, who brought with him quite the fourth of his harem; and so it happened that there were bright-clothed women to dance and sing in every quarter of the camp.



Immediately after the sacrifices and before feasting and drinking had dulled the senses or sapped the energies of the soldiers, Sennacherib called before him in the plain beneath the camp the most skilled of the archers and athletes. Seated in his chariot, with his nobles and his counsellors grouped about him, the King witnessed a series of spirited and manly contests. There were many marvelous feats of leaping, running, riding, chariot racing, casting the javelin, and shooting the bow, in all of which Sennacherib showed the keenest interest, discussing the merits of each contest with Uriel and his nobles.

At night the King entertained the victors in these contests, together with his nobles, captains, chief priests,

and other favored persons, including Uriel, at the crowning feast of that festal day. The supper was served in the largest of the royal tents, where three hundred men or more could stand at ease. The ground was carpeted with bright rugs and glossy furs, and the walls were hung with Tyrian purple, the inwoven threads of which crudely outlined scenes of war and hunting. At one end of this great tented hall, under a purple canopy embroidered with flashing gems, stood an ivory throne richly carved and ornamented, which the King's pride and vanity had caused to follow him from Nineveh.

Etiquette forbade that Sennacherib should actually sup with his guests, and so, while they ate and drank, the throne remained empty.

Not until the tables were removed and the assembly stood waiting, did the King enter and take his seat. As he appeared, the guests prostrated themselves as one man, and when he had mounted the throne they rose to their feet with shouts of acclaim.

The Assyrian monarch wore his most magnificent robes of state and a crown that blazed with jewels. On his breast glittered the emblem of the god Asshur, a starry circle enclosing the figure of a winged man with drawn bow; and beneath it flashed a four-rayed golden orb designed in honor of the sun god Shamas. Not merely as to these costly trappings, but in face, figure, and manner, Sennacherib appeared a kingly man. His courtiers looked on him not with reverence only, but with pride.

“The victors in my games,” said the King, “the captains of my hosts, the nobles of my court, my counselors, my priests, and all here present, I bid welcome. It is now your privilege to drink with the King of men to the success of this his expedition of war, which shall not end until Sethos of Egypt hath kissed his feet and Hezekiah of Judea hath followed his triumphant chariot on foot to Nineveh.”

Amid cries of enthusiasm, Rab-Shakeh presented to the King a golden drinking vessel filled with wine, and the eunuchs who had served the feast distributed brimming goblets among the people. Then, as the King poured out an oblation and drank, the assembly did likewise. At a sign from the throne chosen speak-

ers stood forth one after another and talked of the greatness of the Assyrian name and arms, showering praises upon the well-pleased King. Then minstrels and rhapsodes were called and celebrated Sennacherib's victories in rhythmic measure to the sound of harps, sackbuts, and dulcimers.

“There is among us a sweet singer whom ye have not heard,” said Sennacherib at last, “a captive and a stranger with whom I am well pleased and whom I have, therefore, raised to honor. Stand forth, Uriel, and do thou also sing to me of my great wars and victories.”

“I beg that my lord, the King, will not require this of me,” said Uriel, although he promptly stepped forth and took the harp that was given him.

“ I know not of my lord’s wars and victories, and can sing only of what I have seen or have learned.”

“ Sing, then, what thou wilt, if only it be of great deeds and mighty conflicts.”

So Uriel sang of the Exodus. Improvising with the skill of a trained rhapsode, he chanted to the sound of his harp in rhythmic measure the story of a lowly people enslaved in Egypt, of the plagues and miracles that wrung from the oppressor permission to depart, of the journey forth, of the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that led them, of the angry pursuit and the drowning of the Egyptian king’s army, of the wanderings of the freed people in the wilderness, of their triumphant conquest of the promised land, of the

victories of the great Hebrew captains, of the wars of Saul and David, and of the power and magnificence of the kingdom established under Solomon.

Sennacherib, the nobles, the captains, and the priests, all listened at first with evident interest and pleasure. But as the tale proceeded they were amazed to hear of the great achievements of a people now so small and weak, a people regarded by the all-conquering Assyrians almost with contempt; and there were many frowns and murmurs at the prophetic utterances, alleged to have proceeded from an all-powerful God, which seemed to promise world-wide dominion for a race now only one of the lesser foes of Assyria.

“Thou art proud above thy sta-

tion," said Sennacherib as soon as Uriel had ceased, "and thy people will be wiser when I have humbled them in the dust. They are mad to feed upon the tales of their ancient victories and to trust, to their ruin, in a God who hath abandoned them. Where was this God when my father scattered the ten tribes of Samaria broadcast the earth? Where was He when I myself subdued thy country and carried away two hundred thousand captives?"

"I have told my lord," said Uriel, "that He is, as men say, asleep. But when we have atoned for our sins He will awake. He will awake and even Assyria will tremble!"

"What saith he?" cried out the nobles and captains, amazed.

"'Tis a threat," cried Rab-Shakeh



with suppressed fury. "He dares to threaten the King of men—this upstart Jew! Shall he not die, O King?"

But Sennacherib signed his angry minister to be silent, and then Tartan, the chief captain, spoke:

"Surely the King will not brook such words even from the fair youth he hath so favored?"

Uriel caught a quick breath, and there was a momentary fading of the rich color of his cheek, but otherwise he bravely supported the hostile gaze of the hundreds whom he had angered, making no effort to speak in his own defense and quietly awaiting leave to retire to the background. There was for a brief space an intense silence, and then the King's voice was heard:

“For the love that I bear thee I forgive thee, Uriel, but thy people shall suffer for their insolence that is reflected in thy words.”

And so with bowed head the youth retreated from before the throne and stood back among the nobles at the side.

The clash of cymbals was now heard, and the crowd parted to permit the passage of a troop of dancing women led by eunuchs playing upon many instruments. In scant, bright robes ablaze with jewels these leaped and danced before the King with astonishing agility and grace. They were Babylonian, Egyptian, and Elamite slaves, and could not have been happy in captivity, yet they now smiled with their eyes as well as with their lips. And the King and his

nobles smiled on them in turn, well pleased with their performances.

Sennacherib's drinking vessel had ere now been filled and drained repeatedly, and the effect was visible. He swayed from side to side as he leaned forward watching the dancers, and when the women had retired, and he called with the manner of a drunken man for his footstool, all knew that a hated ceremony, which none dared resist, was now to follow. The footstool having been placed before him and the sandal of his right foot removed, Sennacherib cried loudly, though in a husky and wavering voice:

“Lo, I am king of kings and lord of lords. Asshur, chief of gods, alone is peer of mine. Asshur rules the starry heaven, but Sennacherib rules

the earth. Fall prone before me, all ye people. Come and bow yourselves that the great King may taste his dominion in the touch of his bared foot upon your uncovered necks!"

The nobles and captains of Assyria, one and all, felt themselves degraded by a ceremony invented when Sennacherib was drunken and when his lust of dominion was revealed in all its gross excess. But none dared object or refuse. Instant death would have overtaken him who rebelled, for at such times the King's mood was most dangerous; and so accustomed to slavish subjection were the people of this Oriental despotism that Sennacherib's orders pronouncing death upon the mutinous would have been obeyed as the decree of a god.

So the drunken King now enjoyed

to his soul's satisfaction the delight of pressing his bared foot upon his most noble subjects' uncovered necks, although each one of those subjects frowned covertly ere he went forward to his humiliation.

The great Rab-Shakeh was the first to bow himself and rest his lordly head upon the footstool. As the King pressed his foot with a smile of satisfaction upon his prime minister's neck, the tent was rudely shaken by a sudden and strong gust of wind. The assembled company looked upward and around with alarm, but were reassured on perceiving that the previous calm had merely been followed by a harmless wind storm.

"Ho, Uriel," laughed Sennacherib, reeling on his throne, "is this the 'blast' which the prophet of thy

puny race promised to send upon me? It hath power to shake my proudest tent, but it is only wind. Where are the smoke and flame and universal destruction of my dream? They come not, for gods such as thine—even though they be gods, indeed—fear to assail the all-powerful King Sennacherib!”

## CHAPTER XII

FAILURE—FLIGHT—NIGHT TERRORS .

AMAZED and affrighted at such blasphemous words, and disgusted by the ceremony now in progress, Uriel shrank back out of sight and withdrew, unnoticed, from the tent.

“The King may slay me,” was his thought, “but I will not put my neck beneath his foot.”

He gladly sought the quiet of his own tent, where Naphtali and Josepha, his two dear “children,” lay in peaceful sleep.

“Is this Assyrian king Satan himself in human form?” mused Uriel. “In his drunkenness is it not revealed that he aspires to rule the universe itself and even God? What

merit is his kindness to a few men when such lust as this controls him? I have wondered that one so hard and cruel toward mankind could be to me so soft and warm, but now I know it is only because I am his new play-thing and amuse and please him. There is no real goodness in him. He hath a devil."

Such thoughts as these were interrupted ere the hour was gone by a summons from the King, and Uriel was conducted to the royal bed-chamber. Sennacherib had been disrobed and lay in bed, but insisted on the presence of his favorite harper.

"Let all go out hence," the King commanded, and as the sleepy attendants obeyed he bade Uriel touch the harp and sing.

The youth did not sing. Playing



softly for some moments, he was about to begin a song when he observed that the King's eyes were closed. He played on, more softly still, and when he ceased the King's breathing was that of a drunken man in a profound sleep.

“Now!” whispered Uriel, glancing toward the curtains between the King's chamber and the outer apartment where the sleepy attendants waited. “Now is the time. He hath verily been delivered into my hand.”

Noiselessly the youth put aside the harp, rose to his feet, and stood over the sleeping King, his right hand resting on the dagger in his bosom. He drew the dagger forth and lifted his arm, calculating that if he struck the blow just above the point where Sennacherib's hand rested on his

breast the one most vital part would be surely reached.

“ O God of Judah,” he cried within himself, “ Thou knowest that I do this deed for my country’s sake ! ”

Then his arm descended, but the blow was not struck. He checked himself in time, seeing that the King suddenly turned in bed, and fearing the results of a wild and futile blow. Again Sennacherib lay quiet and again the dagger was raised. Then the King murmured in his sleep :

“ I trust thee, Uriel, because I know thou art pure in heart.’

Uriel recoiled with a low cry of pain, hastily concealing the dagger in his bosom. Then he turned away shuddering, burst through the curtains into the outer apartment, rushed past the wondering attendants, and

returned with all speed to his own tent.

There he sat down, humbled, broken in spirit, bitterly sorrowful, communing with his soul:

“ I cannot do this thing—I cannot. Thanks be to God, I was neither sent on this mission by my countrymen nor commanded by the prophet—for I cannot fulfil it. I listened only to the voice of my own soul and came only of my own will. Therefore the shame of failure is less great, but still it is very great. I cannot be a hero. A hero would think only of his country, but I think also of Naphtali and Josepha, and am too weak to lift my hand against the tyrant who doth trust me and hath dealt with me so generously.

“ Sennacherib is two men, one that

I hate and one that I love; and, woe is me, I cannot strike that which I hate without slaying that which I love. O God of my fathers, why didst Thou make the Assyrian both good and evil and thus disarm me even as I lift my hand to strike! How easy for David to strike down Goliath, who was one piece of wickedness, and most insolent, and also hideous to behold! But Sennacherib is pleasing and comely and kind, and is a Goliath only in that inner part of him which seeks to trample all nations beneath his feet and exalt his kingdom to the stars. He is a tyrant and a blasphemer, but yet, alas, a loving friend!

“I have failed in this—and may God and my people forgive me! But in one thing I need not and will not fail. I will not accept the love and

kindness of Sennacherib, nor go with him to Nineveh unless dragged thither as a slave. I will resign his fleshpots and his honors for the husks and sorrows appointed for my people. I will not fatten in his smile, but suffer miseries in their company. I will go from him this night. I cannot meet death as the slayer of Sennacherib, but I can welcome death—if death it must be—in rescuing Naphthali and Josepha from this camp of blasphemers. I cannot be a hero of Israel, but I can fight and die in battle for my afflicted country. And so now, Lord God, I pray for forgiveness of the past and for strength for the future.”

Such were the thoughts of Uriel as he sat far into the night beside his sleeping “children,” while no sound

save the whistling of the wind was heard throughout the camp. With his head bowed upon his hands he sat on, unconscious of the flight of time.

Thus he remained heedless when the curtain of his tent was lifted and an Assyrian entered. The figure drew near him with noiseless tread. There was no sound, but Uriel's senses at the last moment gave him warning. He looked up suddenly and beheld a man standing before him with uplifted knife.

As he perceived his desperate situation, Uriel's brain acted with the speed of lightning. He did not cry out. He did not rise. He lowered his head and plunged forward, butting the assassin about the knees with terrible force.

Taken by surprise, the intruder

lost his balance and fell over his intended victim to the ground, striking his forehead against a stone water jar and dropping his weapon. Before he could rise or seize his dagger he was gripped in Uriel's embrace. Once, twice, thrice they rolled over. Then Uriel held his foe beneath him, one hand gnawing deep into his throat.

The struggle was soon over. Half stunned by the fall and unable to tear away the suffocating pressure from his throat, the assassin's muscles suddenly relaxed and he lay as if dead. The panting victor caught up the dagger, but assured of the helplessness of the vanquished, bound him hand and foot instead of striking him to the heart. Scarcely had the assassin thus been made secure when he opened his eyes and cast a look of

dumb entreaty upon the youth who bent over him with threatening mien.

“What evil have I done thee that thou shouldst seek my life?” demanded Uriel, his voice pitched low.

“None,” came the husky answer. “Thou art my master’s enemy, not mine.”

“Who is thy master?”

“I dare not tell.”

“Then die the dog’s death thou dost merit!”

“Hold! Only let me live and I shall tell thee. The great Rab-Shakeh is my master. He desireth thy death more than great riches. Art thou not his rival for the King’s favor, and didst thou not take from him a fair young slave?”

“Tell thy master—Rab-Shakeh, the assassin—that when I meet him



in battle I will be less merciful to him than I am now to thee, his slave."

Bidding his captive say no more, Uriel bound a napkin tightly over his mouth, and thus assured that there could be no outcry, he spread a long, dark cloak over the prostrate form. Then he hurriedly made preparations to depart.

"Wake up," he called softly over the couch of Naphtali and then over the couch of Josepha. "Rise and be silent and prepare to follow me."

Wondering and confused, but trustingly, as if both were indeed "children," Naphtali and Josepha obeyed, following Uriel, as soon as their simple preparations were made, to the back entrance of the tent. There they stood silent and waiting, as Uriel watched his chance.

A sentinel paced slowly by, but it was clearly seen in the light of the high full moon that he also had taken too much wine. He staggered slightly as he moved, and his manner was not watchful. Anon he halted and leaned heavily against a tree, with his back to the point where it was necessary to cross his path. Now was the time!

Grasping Josepha's hand and bidding Naphtali follow without noise, Uriel ran rapidly across the open and gained the shelter of the bush-bordered glen. There the three stood still for a few moments, panting and listening. As no outcry followed, it seemed reasonably sure that their flight had not attracted attention. Again taking Josepha's hand and bidding Naphtali follow with the utmost caution against the noise of a

breaking twig or displaced stone, the youth slowly led the way downward through the little glen to the dry bed of a stream which lived only during the rainy season.

The Assyrian encampment had now been left some distance behind, but Uriel still looked warily ahead, fearing to encounter an outer picket line. Even as he now halted, uncertain whether to remain in the bed of the stream or ascend to higher ground, he saw a little way up the slope on the right the dim outline of a small tent, and concluded that there slumbered sentinels while waiting to relieve their comrades. The outposts, therefore, were not far forward.

Whispering more urgent words of caution, Uriel guardedly led the way over the stones of the dry rivulet.

After an anxious half-hour he felt confident that the last of the sentinels were left far behind and that he and his "children" had made good their escape, thanks to the continuing sounds made by the wind and to the stupefying results of the feasting and drinking, in which even the guards at the outposts had probably shared.

But the night's dangers were not passed, for presently, as they ascended a rocky slope, their feet were arrested at the sound of a distant lion's roar. Heard thus in that wild spot in the small hours of the night, it was a sound to chill the heart of the bravest. Josepha clung to Uriel, terrified.

"Where go we, my lord?" asked Naphtali, who till now had remained silent. "Surely my lord would not hunt lions in the night and without chariots or horses or archers?"

“We go not to hunt lions but to escape from the Assyrians and seek the highway that leads to Jerusalem.”

“Jerusalem—Jerusalem,” repeated Naphtali slowly, as if perplexed by a faded memory.

Uriel halted and looked about him, fearing to stop where they were, yet dreading to wander on in a region where lions roamed the night. He took note of two slender palm trees some distance up the hillside, which lifted themselves high above crowding rocks and boulders near their base. On all sides the ground was open, so that one taking refuge there could not fail to mark the approach of an enemy; and doubtless an overhanging rock might be found beneath which shelter could be had from the

night dew. With such purposes in mind Uriel led the way to the spot, concluding to take the risks and go no further till day had dawned. He was too weary to observe the grace and beauty of the palms in the moon's adorning light, but the peace and quiet of the scene appealed to him and gave him confidence.

"Here will we rest," he said, as they arrived at the foot of the nearest palm.

Immediately an ominous sound, as of the indrawn breath and heavy tread of a great beast, smote upon his ear, and before there was time to draw back, a lion leaped forth from the rocks and stood before them with bristling mane.

Obeying his first impulse, Uriel caught up Josepha in his arms and

ran. Turning to look back, he saw that Naphtali stood rooted to the spot, staring into the eyes of the lion, which had not yet sprung upon him. Then, in an agony of alarm, the youth put down his burden and seized his bow. As he fitted an arrow, he called frantically to his father to run away. But Naphtali did not move; and as the son hesitated to let fly the arrow, he heard his father speak.

“Trouble us not, good lion,” said Naphtali, beseechingly. “We be not Assyrian lords who would hunt thee down and kill thee in cruel sport. We would do thee no hurt. And thou, why shouldst thou wish to harm a poor old man and a little child?”

The great beast snuffed the air fiercely as the demented man spoke thus, but did not move.

“Come away!” called Uriel again.

“Go back to thy bed, good lion, and be at peace.”

“The lion does not harm him,” said Josepha, in wonder and relief.

“Peradventure it is because he is mad and is protected by the angels of God,” said Uriel, awestruck.

“Does the lion see the angels when we see them not?” asked Josepha, with growing confidence.

“I know not, but surely some instinct causes the beast to pause in fear.”

Occupied with this strange scene, neither Uriel nor Josepha marked the stealthy approach of three armed Assyrians. Unknown to the fugitives, three of the sentinels at the outposts had seen and followed them, the pursuers gaining rapidly on the pur-



sued as the latter now halted and called out to each other in this unaccountable way. For the Assyrians did not see the lion, the beast being screened from their view by an intervening rock as they drew near.

“Come, let us go,” urged Uriel again, and then he uttered a low cry, throwing his arm involuntarily about Josepha, when he saw the Assyrian soldiers rush forward.

One of them made straight at Naphtali with uplifted sword, and the others aimed arrows at Uriel, calling upon him to yield. At this moment, with a mighty roar, the lion sprang past Naphtali and bore the foremost Assyrian to the earth. With cries of terror, the other two turned and fled down the slope by the way they had come.

Naphtali, as if awakened from a dream, now turned to look for his friends. Before a hand could be put forth to stop her, Josepha ran to the old man's side, caught his arm, and hurried him away. Then Uriel laid firm hold on both of his "children" and ran with them from the dread spot, pursued by the hoarse snarling of the lion as it devoured its prey.

Running at great speed in the opposite direction from that taken by the Assyrians, they did not pause till Josepha dragged upon the arm that supported her and gasped for breath. Then Naphtali and Uriel carried her on their shoulders in turn, and thus they pushed on for miles.

At last they were compelled to halt from insupportable weariness, choosing an open hillside clear of both

rocks and trees, where the moonlight enabled them to see for some distance in all directions. There Josepha lay down and slept, wrapped in a long cloak and guarded by the youth and the old man, who sat on either side of her. Urged to do so, Naphtali also lay down at last and fell asleep as readily as a child.

By this time the moon had set, and Uriel kept watch alone under the calm, hope-inspiring stars. As time passed and no immediate danger threatened, his tense attitude relaxed; but he remained always alert, his bow and spear in readiness. Thus he watched the slow miracle of dawn and the deepening of the rose and saffron hues above the eastern hills.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE MIRACLE IS WROUGHT

AS URIEL rose to look about him in the full light of a clear morning, he reached the immediate conclusion that for a day or two it would be wise to remain in the shelter of the hills, meanwhile pushing northward as rapidly as the difficulties would permit. Thus the scouting bands of Assyrians might be avoided, and later it would be safer to follow the highways winding through the valleys.

The atmosphere was sweet, cool, and still about their resting-place, the east was bright, but black and troubled clouds hung in the west over the site of the Assyrian camp. Uriel looked long, and he greatly wondered,

for the heavy darkness seemed to stand still, instead of moving across wide reaches of the sky as storm clouds are wont to do.

In the valley between him and the hills, beyond which hung the great black cloud, he now took note of a winding highway. Waking Naphtali and bidding him keep watch, the youth made his way downward, bow in hand. Screened among rocks and shrubs, he looked up and down the highway, wondering whence it came and whither it led. He saw no man nor beast, and was about to turn and retrace his steps when his attention was arrested by a distant, rumbling sound.

With the passing of each moment the sound grew in volume, and not long was he left in doubt as to its

meaning. Suddenly a cloud of dust rose on the highway, where it first came into view around a distant hill, and then the forms of men on horse-back and in chariots appeared. Every action of these men showed fear and haste. They leaned far forward and lashed their plunging beasts without ceasing. As they drew nearer Uriel perceived in great astonishment that they were Assyrians and—fugitives!

What unforeseen turn of fortune's wheel was this? Had the Jews and Egyptians in combined force fallen upon the sleeping camp of Sennacherib in the night and routed the proud invaders? Overjoyed by this thought, Uriel forgot caution and rushed down to the very borders of the road as the foremost of the fugitives thundered past, their faces begrimed with dust

and sweat, their wild eyes fixed upon the highway before them, and their uplifted hands raining blows upon their horses. It was flight, indeed, and accompanied by such terror as no defeated army had ever known.

The Assyrian nobles and captains were in many cases without arms and for the most part but half-clothed. Rab-Saris, the chief eunuch, stood in his thin night robe beside his charioteer, urging greater haste with frantic gestures and looking behind him with bulging eyes, as if pursued by a legion of flying devils. The great Rab-Shakeh seemed mad with fear. He cursed those who raced past him and furiously called on those in front of him to make way for the King's prime minister. He beat his charioteer with his fists, commanding

him to ride down and crush all who blocked the way. And suddenly he himself was overtaken by the fate he willed for others. A heavy chariot drawn by maddened horses colliding with his own, he lost his balance, clutched the empty air, and with a terrible cry fell to the ground, whence he could not rise and where he was soon pounded lifeless beneath crowding hoofs and crushed beyond recognition under heavy wheels. No one took note of him. The hurrying, the shouting, the lashing of the beasts, the thunder of hoofs and wheels still went on.

The spectacle recalled to Uriel the story of the flight of a proud army of invaders in the old times, when courage was put into the hearts of the despairing Israelites by the prophetic



promise that "a shaking leaf" should chase their enemies. Whether it were from a triumphant sword or but "a shaking leaf,"—a madness of groundless fright,—it was plain that the mighty Assyrians were now abject and helpless in the grip of fear.

"Uriel! Uriel!" a voice was heard calling. "Leap into my chariot and come with me, Uriel! Come with me to Nineveh!"

A chariot had turned aside and stopped, and in it was Sennacherib, wild-eyed, dishevelled, and half clothed, straining upon the reins to check the plunging horses, which the terrified charioteer alone could not have controlled.

"My lord, O my lord, what hath befallen thee?" cried Uriel, running forward.

“It was the ‘blast,’” shouted Sennacherib above the uproar, “the ‘blast’ promised by the prophet hath been sent upon me by thy God!”

“Is it even so?”

“Didst thou not see for thyself? Wast thou not there?” asked the King, then glancing aside at the maddened fugitives rushing past, he forgot everything but the terrifying “blast,” and hurried on to speak of it with the manner of one half-crazed with horror and fear:

“It came as was shown to me in my dream with clouds of smoke and devouring flame, or else we were all seized with a common madness and saw the visions of things that were not. When I awoke the camp seemed to have been overwhelmed in the twinkling of an eye while yet we

slept. I know not of a certainty the nature of the terrible visitation, or whence it came, but I know that only a remnant has escaped. My proud army is a crazed and fleeing wreck. Men slew and trampled on their brothers in their haste to escape the poisoned blackness that enveloped us. And so, behold me here, a fugitive, a king undone."

"Alas, my lord," said Uriel, moved to sympathy and pity. Then, stirred with a strange exaltation: "Now thou knowest, O King, that the God of Judah is the God of the world."

"He is a great and terrible God," admitted Sennacherib, shuddering, "and hath punished me for my rash defiance. Come with me to Nineveh, Uriel, and teach me the way of His worship that I may atone."

“Gladly would I teach thee the way of the worship of our God, who prizeth a clean heart above the smoke of sacrifices, but I cannot go with thee, O King.”

“Come, Uriel, for the love I bear thee and for what I will do for thee. After me none in all Assyria shall be greater than thee.”

“Nay, nay, my lord. I had rather be a shepherd in the land of Judah than a mighty prince in Assyria. Go thy way, O King, and fare thee well!”

Sennacherib opened his mouth to speak again, but there came a great shock and he fell against his charioteer. Passing wheels had collided with his own and now his snorting horses, no longer under control, plunged madly along the highway. Thus was the king of Assyria borne forever from the sight of Uriel.

Soon those who fled on horses and in chariots had all passed by, and were lost in the dust that rose from the highway in a cloud. Then for a little while there was quiet. Then the sound of hurrying feet and a clamor of gasping voices were heard, and the fugitives who had been unable or too hurried to secure their beasts streamed past on foot. With the same begrimed and sweating brows, the same wild eyes looking neither to right nor left, they jostled and fought each other for room, as they fled along the highway.

Soon they, too, were lost in the cloud of dust, and then a single man appeared, swaying from side to side as he struggled painfully to increase his speed. Suddenly he uttered a despairing cry and fell almost at the

feet of Uriel. Lifting a handful of dust, he cast it on his head and then lay still. It was the priest, Tiglathi-Nin.

From one of the fleeing chariots a chest had fallen and burst open. Out from the scattered treasure a golden goblet had rolled. This Uriel filled with water at a near-by spring, returned with it, and knelt beside the fallen man. When Tiglathi-Nin revived, his face was wet, a cooling cup was at his lips, and his head rested in friendly arms.

“Alas that I still live,” he groaned, looking about him fearfully. Then, seeing that some one held him: “Let me go! Let me arise and flee ere the terror overtake me!”

“Fear not,” gently answered Uriel. “Now thou art safe. ’Tis

plain that the destroying hand will not pursue beyond the borders of yon accursed camp. The remnant will be allowed to flee to Nineveh and tell the awful tale, that the men of the farthest regions may hear and take warning. I have spoken with Sennacherib and know how the 'blast' fell on him in the night."

" 'Tis Uriel," said Tiglathi-Nin, gaining in strength and sitting up. "I am safe with thee, for it was thy God that sent destruction upon us, and He, I know well, is pleased with thee. Thinkest thou, good Uriel, that thy God Himself descended upon our camp with a sword of fire?"

"I know not the ways of Him who walketh upon the clouds," said the youth, with awe, "but I well know that the fiery blast that fell upon yon

camp of blasphemers obeyed His will. The prophet's words are fulfilled and the mighty are fallen. Sennacherib hath not a real hook in his nose, nor a real bridle in his lips, but his soul is broken and bowed down, and terror will chase him to the gates of Nineveh, whence he will dare to march no more against my people. The Lord of hosts hath discomfited him."

So spoke Uriel with the solemn conviction that was cherished by all his people after they learned of the sudden flight of Sennacherib with but a remnant of his great army. In the Hebrew chronicle of that time it is written that destruction fell upon the mighty invaders as they slept in the night. "*The angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and four score*



*and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.”*

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE CHOICE OF TIGLATHI-NIN

URIEL rose to his feet and stood watching several beasts of burden that now appeared straying along the highway with no sign of fear, the pack-asses walking deliberately and the camels halting now and then to bite into prickly pear bushes on the borders of the road, heedless alike of the thorns and of the "terror" behind them, from which their masters had fled so madly.

"'Tis plain, O Uriel," said Tiglathi-Nin, as he also got upon his feet, "that thy God is greater than all gods. My name, as thou knowest, is Tiglathi-Nin, or Adoration-be-to-Nin. Would that I might henceforth

be called Tiglathî-Jehovah. Good Uriel, how may I learn the worship of this God of thine? ”

Uriel turned and looked keenly at the Assyrian priest.

“ Would thy people permit, O Uriel, that I go with thee to Jerusalem and learn of His worship and His laws? ”

“ Speakest thou from the heart or from fear alone? ” solemnly inquired the youth. “ Too often doth man repent of having repented when the humility begotten of fear hath departed from him.”

“ Yea, it is the steadfast desire of my heart to sacrifice to this greatest of gods.”

“ Our God is satisfied not with sacrifices only, but requireth a clean heart. He demandeth of us that we

do justice and love mercy and walk in the way of good deeds.”

“All this would I render unto Him.”

“And He must be acknowledged alone as God.”

“’Tis a hard saying,” faltered Tiglathi-Nin, “but this also I might render after I learn more of Him. Let me go with thee.”

“Come with me if thou wilt. I promise to persuade my people to treat thee as a friend.”

“No more can I ask.”

“Then help me to secure the beasts of burden that we need for the journey.”

So Uriel called Josepha and Naph-tali to come down, and with the help of the two men caught three of the straying camels, after which prepara-

tions for their northward journey were begun. Later the four sat down to refresh themselves with food, and after answering as best he could the wondering questions of little Josepha in regard to the calamity visited upon the Assyrians, Uriel gravely questioned Tiglathî-Nin in turn:

“Tell me, good friend, what thou knowest of that which befell thy people in the night.”

“I know not what I saw in visions and what with waking eyes,” the Assyrian priest replied. “Like a dream of maddening terrors it all now seems to me. Methought I was aroused from sleep by the cries of women and the shouts of men. The blackness of the night lay upon us like a monstrous weight, so that I gasped for breath; and through this

thick darkness methought I heard the sound of rushing wings, as if things of evil hovered above and blew their poisonous breath upon us. I cannot tell thee how I know, and yet I know that thousands were stricken where they lay and rose not from their beds. Other thousands slew and trod upon each other as they struggled to escape the nameless death that chased them forth.

“Reeling like a drunken man, I found my way to the royal couch. The great captain, Tartan, was there before me. ‘Get thee up and flee,’ he cried, and rudely shook the King. Together we seized and dragged him forth, gasping, all of us, for breath. We fought our way among cursing men and shrieking women and everywhere trod upon the dead. We leaped

aside from the rush of unseen horses and from the wheels of faintly gleaming chariots, and crossed at last the bounds of the great encampment. And now we drew our breath more freely and could better see our way. Looking back, from rising ground, we saw no camp, but only a great black, eddying cloud that rose to heaven, illumined by what seemed floating tongues of flame. It was as if lightning flashed unceasingly, revealing the dusky, horrid faces of misshapen demons of the air that gloated upon and mocked the universal death.

“ ‘Look!’ cried Sennacherib. ‘Behold, the ‘blast’ hath come upon me and my prophetic dream is fulfilled.’ With a loud cry he rent his clothes and flung him down and wallowed in

the dust. He clutched the earth and cast dust on his head. We, too, cast dust upon our heads and joined in his cries to our defeated gods.

“ ‘ O Asshur, where art thou ? ’ cried proud Sennacherib. ‘ What is this fearful, monstrous thing ? How have I kindled thy dread wrath ? Have not I conquered in thy name and spread thy glorious worship to the four quarters of the world ? Have not I done thy will and sacrificed to thee at all appointed times ? Have not I raised to thee a thousand images and carved in thy temples on plates of stone the records of my victories ? O Asshur, king of gods, forsake me not ! ’

“ Then called the King on many gods—on Nergal, Anu, Shamas, Hoa, Nin. ‘ Hear me and hearken, mighty



ones!’ But no answer came, and he arose and stood before us like a broken thing. ‘Our gods are dead,’ quoth he, ‘and we must die.’

“‘Thou sayest right, the gods are dead,’ I answered like one mad. ‘Lo, Judah’s God hath slain them all.’

“Then the terror that pursued us in the blackness of the camp grew upon us and upon all those that halted round us. ‘Up! let us go,’ Sennacherib cried. ‘A horse! a chariot! Quick, ere the wrath descend upon us where we stand!’

“And now, as a chariot was driven out of the eddying darkness on our right hand, Tartan leaped before the horses, checking them, and the King mounted and was gone. I followed on foot, jostled by fleeing men and threatened by plunging horses, and

the dawn found me weary and alone, left far behind, on this highway.”

At a later hour of that memorable morning, as the four travellers pressed forward on their camels and followed the highway to the crest of a hill, they saw that the black, fell cloud still hung over the site of the Assyrian camp. Throughout the day, whenever they reached high ground, they saw it still; but on the morrow they looked for it in vain, whether because the distance was now so great or because the mysterious cloud was dissipated, they could not tell. But both Tiglathi-Nin and Uriel felt assured that naught remained of the proud Assyrian camp but a blasted emptiness over which vultures soared, waiting for their hour.

After a space of days, when the

travellers reached the crest of another hill, they looked and saw the towers and white palaces of Jerusalem glistening under the sun of a cloudless sky. They saw the fertile green country, the encompassing hills, the palm trees and olives, untouched by the invader's destroying hand, and tears of rapture filled their eyes.

“Jerusalem! Jerusalem!” cried Josepha.

“Beautiful,” murmured Tiglathî-Nin.

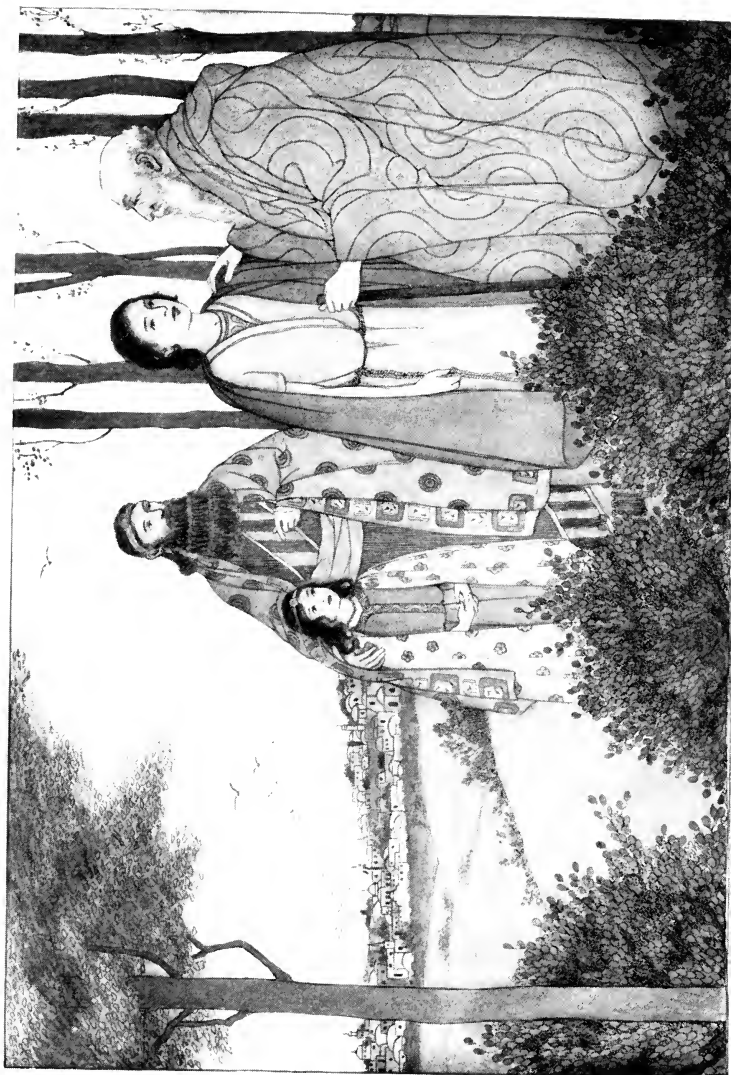
Naphtali gazed upon the scene in silence, a troubled look suggestive of dawning recognition on his face.

His voice shaken with emotion, Uriel gave the order to dismount and rest. Then taking his harp, and standing with his gaze fixed on the distant city, he improvised softly as

the spontaneous outpouring of his thankful heart took rhythmical form. And this was the burden of his song of rejoicing:

“Blessed be the God of Israel who hath once more revealed Himself and saved His people! Praise be to Him who is our tower of strength, our mighty deliverer! For He hath descended in a rain of fire upon our strong enemy, He hath discomfited the Assyrians with arrows of flame. He shook the mountains, He thundered in the heavens, and came down in thick clouds of smoke. He sent His angel before Him with a flaming sword, and smote the Assyrians mightily, so that few were left to flee. Yea, He sent darts of fire among them and scattered them afar; He shot lightnings and terrified them, chas-





ing them even to the gates of Nineveh. So we are saved. So the land of Judah is set free, and the yoke of the stranger is taken from our necks. For this, O mighty God, we render thanks to Thee whom we love and whom we fear. For this, O Israel, let us give thanks not with our lips only but with an offering of humble hearts and righteous deeds."

The song had no sooner ended than all eyes were drawn to Naphtali. He had seated himself to listen, his troubled eyes meanwhile fixed upon the distant city. Suddenly he started up in great excitement, turning to Uriel.

"Jerusalem—there lieth 'Jerusalem,'" he cried, "and I am Naphtali, but who art thou? Whence comest thou, and what hast thou to do with

me? Have I slept a long sleep? What do I here?"

"I have saved thee from the Assyrians, and now I take thee home," gently spoke Uriel after he, too, had started up, dropping his harp. "In cruel captivity among the Assyrians thou didst forget all former things."

"It was even so—now I remember. But—who art thou?"

"My father! O my father! Dost thou not know thy son?"

"Thou, my Uriel? . . . Thou art he in truth. I know thee now, even though the years have brought thee the stature of a man. Alas, the long, hard years!"

With such words, and with cries and tears, they fell upon and kissed each other, while the Assyrian priest stood by exulting, and Josepha wept in sympathy.



## CHAPTER XV

### JERUSALEM SALUTES A HERO

THE GATES of Jerusalem were still shut against the expected advance of the enemy, but those looking down from the walls saw nothing to fear in the four travellers who rode up in haste, calling out that they brought good news. The Water Gate was opened to them, and they rode into the presence of an anxious, clamoring crowd.

“Rejoice, good people,” cried Uriel, “for the Assyrians have fled and Jerusalem is saved.”

It so happened that Amnon, the uncle of Uriel, and Joab, and Shamah—the three old men who had seen the youth go forth upon his mission—

were in the crowd. Instantly they raised their voices, beside themselves with excitement and joy.

“It is Uriel, our Uriel,” cried Amnon, “he that went forth to slay Sennacherib!”

“Behold a hero!” shouted Shamah. “With his one strong arm he hath slain the oppressor.”

And Joab, whose voice carried like a trumpet, cried aloud again and again: “Uriel hath slain Sennacherib and the Assyrians are fled!”

The cry was taken up by the people and carried throughout Jerusalem, and never was heard such an uproar of joyful cries. Uriel strove to speak and explain, but such was the clamor that he could not be heard. His voice was drowned in the shout: “Lead him to the King! To the palace!”

So the three camels, the first bearing Uriel and Josepha, the second Naphtali, and the third Tiglathi-Nin, were led through the streets of the city to the palace of King Hezekiah. The rejoicing people roared around them, and women ran before them with garlands and dances and timbrels, saluting Uriel as a hero and singing songs in his praise.

Happiness beamed upon every face except that of Uriel himself. When they dismounted at the marble steps of the palace, and the women wreathed him in garlands, he strove again to speak, and again could not be heard. So he and Josepha and Naphtali and Tiglathi-Nin were conducted with music and great pomp into the vast hall of audience where King Hezekiah sat on Solomon's ivory throne awaiting them.

“Welcome, brave youth,” said the King, most graciously. “Thy good tidings have run before thee, but I would have thee tell the tale with thine own lips.”

Men marvelled that the manner of Uriel was not that of a hero standing before his smiling king but rather that of a sinner before his judge. Tears streamed down his face as he struggled to speak.

“I am unworthy of this honor, O King,” he faltered. “Thou seest in me no hero, but one who was not strong enough to lift his hand against the Assyrian oppressor. It is true I went forth to slay him, but my heart failed me. Sennacherib still lives.”

A groan went up from the assembled multitude, and those who till now had looked on him with love accused

him with their eyes. Conscious of this great change that had come in the twinkling of an eye, Uriel glanced shrinkingly about him, until his eye alighted on the face of his own dear mother, who stood with his uncle. Seeing her smile of welcome and perfect trust, he took courage and stood undaunted before his people.

“What sayest thou?” asked the King, amazed. “Then the Assyrians are not fled?”

“The terrified remnant of them are fled and their king with them,” said Uriel, “but their proud camp is a blasted emptiness and their choicest legions are dead. The Lord God hath slain and scattered the Assyrian hosts.”

A sigh of relief ran through the multitude, and a great shout was

checked only at sight of the King speaking:

“Is it even so? Then the prophet’s word is fulfilled. Thanks be to our God who hath saved us from our enemies! But speak on. Tell us all thou knowest and all thou hast done.”

So Uriel spoke long and freely, telling of his vow to slay Sennacherib and save his country, of his journey to the Assyrian camp, of the favor shown him by the Assyrian monarch, of his gratitude and of his sorrow because he could not strike the blow, of his escape with Josepha and Naphthali, of the fleeing Assyrians, and of what he had learned of the great miracle that saved the land of Judah and humbled the proudest of kings.

“Hear, O people,” said Hezekiah when he had heard all. “I proclaim

this a day of fasting and prayer and sacrifices, and to-morrow—after we have thus humbled ourselves with thankful hearts before our great and merciful God—to-morrow let there be joy and feasting. Go now to your homes and at the call of the High Priest present yourselves in the Temple.”

Then, turning to Uriel, the King spoke graciously:

“Thou art a brave and noble youth. Who shall say that thou art less a hero because thy hand was stayed by the gratitude of a good and generous heart? Henceforth thou art the favored friend of thy King. Thou shalt have a collar of beaten gold and a princely robe. And this Assyrian priest, thy friend, shall be used with all kindness. The daughter of Gama-

liel, this dear child whom thou didst save from a cruel fate, shall become thy wife when she hath reached a proper age, and all the great wealth of her father's house shall be thine. Go now with thy family and be at peace."







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